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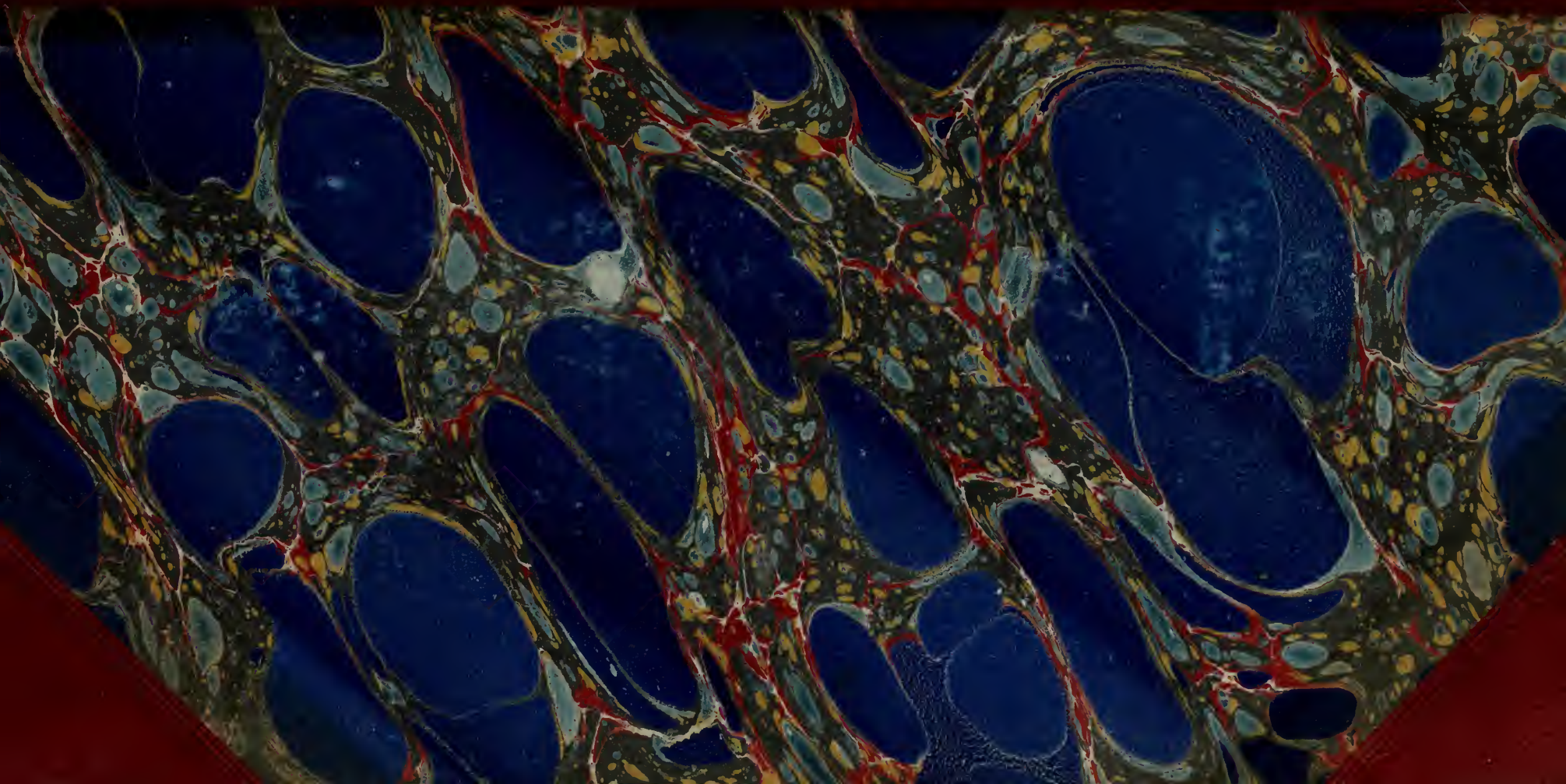

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M. ELLEN EDWARDS. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"ELLA STOOD, FAN IN HAND."

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD.

VOLUME XXIX.

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"Ella stood, fan in hand."
"Mrs. Keen was having her sign repainted."
"They walked through the dewy glades of the Park."
"At that moment he felt that he loved her dearly."
Philip and Mrs. Ducie meet at Lord Camberley's.
"The Squire says you may read this!" said Hubert.

THE ARGOSY.

JANUARY, 1880.

THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

CHAPTER I.

GILBERT DENISON'S WILL.

THE First Gentleman in Europe sat upon the throne of his fathers, and the Battle of Waterloo was a stupendous event that still dwelt freshly in men's memories, when one bright August evening, Gilbert Denison, gentleman, of Heron Dyke, Norfolk, lay dying in his lodgings in Bloomsbury Square, London.

He was a man of sixty, and, but a few days before he had been full of life, health, and energy. As he was riding into town from Enfield, where he had been visiting some friends, his horse slipped, fell, and rolled heavily over its rider. All had been done for Gilbert Denison that surgical skill could do, but to no avail. His hours were numbered, and none knew that sad fact better than the dying man. But in that strong, rugged, resolute face could not be read any dread of the approaching end. He was a Denison, and no Denison had ever been known to fear anything.

By the bedside sat his favourite nephew and heir, whose christian name was also Gilbert. He was a young man of three or four and twenty with a face which, allowing for the difference in their years, was, both in character and features, singularly like that of his uncle. Gilbert the younger was not, and never had been, a handsome man; but his face was instinct with power, it expressed strength of will, and a sort of high, resolute defiance of fortune in whatever guise she might present herself. This young man carried a riding-whip in his hand; on a table near, lay a pair of buckskin gloves. He wore Hessian boots with tassels, and a bottle-green riding coat much braided and befrogged. His vest was of striped nankin, and he carried two watches with a huge bunch of seals pendant from each of them:

while, over the velvet collar of his coat, fell his long hair. His throat was swathed in voluminous folds of soft white muslin, tied in a huge bow, and fastened with a small brooch of brilliants. Our young gentleman evidently believed himself to be a diamond of the first water.

The August sun shone warmly into the room, through the half open windows came the hum of traffic in the streets ; a vagrant breeze, playing at hide-and-seek among the heavy hangings of the bed, brought with it a faint odour of mignonette from the boxes on the broad window-sills outside. A hand of the dying man sought a hand of his nephew, found it, and clasped it. The latter had been expressing his sorrow at finding his uncle in so sad a state, and his hopes that he would yet get over the results of his accident.

"There is no hope of that, boy," said Mr. Denison. "A few hours more, and all will be ended. But why should you be sorry ? Is the heir ever really sorry when he sees the riches and power, which all his life he has been taught will one day be his, coming at last into his own grasp ? Human nature's pretty much the same all the world over."

" But I am indeed heartily sorry ; believe me or not, uncle, as you like."

" I will try to believe you, boy," said Mr. Denison with a faint smile, " and that, perhaps, will answer the same purpose."

There was silence for a little while, then the sick man resumed. "Nephew, this is a sad, wild, reckless life that you have been leading in London these four years past."

" It is all that, uncle."

" Had I lived, what would the end of it have been ? "

" Upon my word, I don't know. Utter beggary I suppose."

" How much money are you possessed of ? "

" I won a hundred guineas the other night at faro. I am not aware that I possess much beyond that."

" And your debts ? "

The young man mused a moment. " Really, I hardly know to a hundred or two. A thousand pounds would probably cover them, but I am not sure."

" A thousand pounds ! And I have paid your debts twice over within the last four years ! "

Gilbert the younger smiled. " You see, uncle, the schedule I sent you each time was not a complete one. I did not care to let you know every liability."

" You did not expect me to assist you again ? "

" Certainly not, sir, after the last letter you wrote me. I knew that when you wrote in that strain you meant what you said. I should never have troubled you again."

" After your hundred guineas had gone—and they would last you but a very short time—what did you intend to do ? "

"I had hardly thought seriously about it. Perhaps the fickle goddess might have smiled on me again. If not, I should have done something or other. Probably enlisted."

"Enlisted as a common soldier?"

"As a common soldier. I don't know that I'm good for much else."

"But all that is changed now. Or at least you suppose so."

"I suppose nothing of the kind, sir," said the young man hotly.

"As the master of Heron Dyke, with an income of six thousand a year, you will be a very different personage from a needy young rake, haunting low gaming tables, and trying to pick up a few guineas at faro, from bigger simpletons than yourself."

Gilbert the younger sprang to his feet, his lips white and quivering with passion. "Sir, you insult me," he said, "and with your permission, I will retire." And he took up his hat and gloves.

"Sit down, sir—sit down, I say," cried the elder man, sternly. "Don't imagine that I have done with you yet?"

"I have never been a frequenter of low gaming houses; I have never cheated at cards in my life," said the young man proudly.

"You would not have been a Denison if you had cheated at cards. But again I tell you to sit down. I have much to say to you."

Gilbert the younger did as he was told, but with something of an ill grace. In his eyes there was a cold, hard look, that had not been there before.

"Nephew, if you have not yet disgraced yourself—and I don't believe that you have—you are on the high road to do so. Has it ever entered your head to think whither such mad doings as yours must inevitably land you?"

"I suppose that other men before me have sown their wild oats," said Gilbert, sulkily. "I have heard it said, that you yourself, sir ——"

"Never mind me. The question we have now to consider is that of *your* future. When you are master of Heron Dyke—if you ever do become its master—is it your intention to make ducks and drakes of the old property, as you have made ducks and drakes of the fortune left you by your father?"

"Really, sir, that is a question that has never entered into my thoughts."

"Then it is high time that it did enter them. I said just now 'If you ever do become the master of Heron Dyke.'"

"Was that intended as a threat, sir?" asked Gilbert, a little fiercely.

"Never mind what it is intended as, but listen to me. I presume you are quite aware that it is in my power to leave Heron Dyke to anyone whom I may choose to nominate as my heir—to the greatest stranger in England if I like to do so?"

"I am of course aware that the property is not entailed," said the other stiffly.

"And never has been entailed," said Mr. Denison, with emphasis- "It has come down, from heir male to heir male, for six hundred years. Providence having blessed me with no children of my own, by the unwritten law of the family, the property would descend in due sequence to you. But that unwritten law is one which I have full power to abrogate, if I think well to do so. Such being the case, ask yourself this question, Gilbert Denison: 'Judging from my past life for the last four years, am I a fit and proper person to become the representative of one of the oldest families in Norfolk? And would my uncle, taking into account all that he knows of me, be really justified in putting me into that position?'"

The elder man paused, the younger one hung his head. "I think, sir, that the best thing you can do, will be to let me go headlong to ruin after my own fashion," was all that he said.

"You will be good enough to remember that I have another nephew," resumed the dying man. "There is another Gilbert Denison, as well as yourself."

"Aye! I'm not likely to forget him," said the other, savagely.

"So! You have met, have you? Well, from all I have heard of my brother Henry's son, he is a clever, industrious, and well conducted young man—one not given, as some people are, to wine-bibbing, and all kinds of riotous living. Had you been killed in a brawl, which seems a by no means unlikely end for you to come to, he would have stood as the next heir to Heron Dyke."

Young Gilbert writhed uneasily in his chair; the frown on his face grew darker as he listened. "And even as matters are," resumed his uncle, blandly, "even though you have not yet come to an untimely end, it is quite competent for me to pass you over and nominate your cousin as my heir."

"Oh, sir, this is intolerable!" cried the young man, starting to his feet for the second time. "To see you as you are, uncle, grieves me to the bottom of my heart: believe me or not. But I did not come here to be preached at. No man knows my faults and follies so well as I know them myself. Leave your property as you may think well to do so; but I hope and pray, sir, that you will never mention the subject to me again."

He turned to quit the room, and had reached the door, when he heard his uncle's voice call his name faintly. Looking back, he was startled to see the change which a few seconds had wrought in the dying man. His eyes were glassy, the pallor of his face had deepened to a deathlike whiteness. Gilbert was seriously frightened: he thought the end had come. There was some brandy in a decanter on the little table. It was the work of a moment to pour some into a glass. Then with the aid of a teaspoon, he inserted a small portion of the spirit between the teeth of the unconscious man. This he did again and again, and in a little while he was gratified by seeing some signs of returning life. There was an Indian feather-fan on the

chimney-piece. With this, having first flung the window wide open, he proceeded to fan his uncle's face. Presently Mr. Denison sighed deeply, and the light of consciousness flickered slowly back into his eyes. He stared at his nephew for a moment as though wondering whom he might be, smiled faintly, and pointed to a chair.

Gilbert took one of his uncle's clammy hands in his, chafed it gently for a little while and then pressed it to his lips. "You are better now, sir," he said.

"Yes, I am better. 'Twas nothing but a little faintness. I shall not die before to-morrow night." He lay for a little while in silence, gazing up at the ceiling like one in deep thought. Then he said, "And now about the property, Bertie."

The young man thrilled at the word. His uncle had not called him by that name since he was quite a lad. "Oh, sir, do not trouble yourself any more about the property," he cried. "Whatever you have done you have no doubt done for the best."

"But I want to tell you what I have done and why I have done it. To-morrow I may not have strength to do so." Young Gilbert moved uneasily in his chair. The sick man noticed it. "Impatient of control as ever," he said, with a smile. "Headstrong—wilful—obstinate; you are a true Denison. Measure me a dose out of that bottle on the chimney-piece. It will give me strength."

Gilbert did as he was bidden, and then resumed his seat by the bedside. "It was not a likely thing, my boy, that I should leave the estate away from you," resumed Mr. Denison: and, despite all his self-control, a sudden light leapt into Gilbert's eyes as he heard the words.

"Notwithstanding all your wild ways and outrageous carryings on, I have never ceased to love you. You have been to me as my own son; as your father was to me a true brother. As for Henry, although he is dead, there was no love lost between us. We quarrelled and parted in anger, as we should quarrel and part in anger again were he still alive. I do not want to think that a son of his will ever call Heron Dyke his home."

Young Gilbert's face darkened again at the mention of his cousin's name. As between the two brothers years ago there had been a feud that nothing had ever healed, so between the two cousins there had arisen a deadly enmity, which nothing in this world (so young Gilbert vowed a thousand times to himself) should ever bridge over. They were good haters, those Denisons, and never more so than when they had quarrelled with one of their own kith and kin.

"No, the old roof-tree shall be yours, Gilbert, and all that pertains to it," continued Mr. Denison, "as you will find when my will comes to be read. You will find, too, a good balance to your credit at the Bank, for I have not been an improvident man. At the same time I have had expenses and losses of which you know nothing. But—there is a 'but' to everything in this world, you know—you will find

in my will a certain proviso which I doubt not you will think a strange one, most probably a hard one, and which I feel sure you will at first resent almost as if I had done you a personal injury. It has not been without much thought and deliberation that the proviso I speak of has been embodied in the will, but I fully believe that twenty years hence, should you live as long, you will bless my memory for having so introduced it."

Mr. Denison lay back for a moment or two to gather breath. His nephew spake no word, but sat with his eyes bent studiously on the floor.

"Gilbert, as a rule we Denisons are a long-lived race," resumed the dying man, "and but for this unhappy accident, I have a fancy that I should have worn for another score years at the least. If you have ever been at the trouble to read the inscriptions on the tombs of your ancestors in Nullington Church, you must have noticed how many of them lived to be seventy-five, eighty, and in some cases ninety years of age. Now, what prospect, or likelihood, is there of your living to be even seventy years old? Your constitution is impaired already. That dark sunken look about the eyes, those fine-drawn lines around the mouth, what business have they there at your age? I tell you, Gilbert Denison, that if you do not change your mode of life at once and for ever, you will not live to see your thirtieth birthday. And what probability is there that you will change it? That is the question that I have asked myself, not once, but a thousand times. If this wild and reckless mode of life has such fascinations for you, that it has induced you to dissipate the fortune left you by your father, to apply to me more than once to extricate you from your difficulties, to involve you deeply with the money-lenders, and to bring you at length to contemplate I know not what as a mode of escape from your troubles, what sort of hold will it have over you, when you come into the uncontrolled possession of six thousand a year? That is a problem which I, for my part, cannot answer."

Mr. Denison paused as though he expected Gilbert to answer his last question. There was silence for a little while, and then the nephew spoke in a low, constrained voice. "I can only repeat, sir, what I said before: that you had better let me go headlong to ruin my own way."

"Not so. I have told you already that I have made you my heir. Heron Dyke, and all that pertains to it, will call you master in a few short hours. It ——" but here he broke off for a moment to overcome some inward emotion. "I shall never see the old place again, and I had such schemes for the next dozen years! Well—well; we Denisons are not children that we should cry because our hopes are taken from us."

"Sir, is not this excitement bad for you?" asked the nephew. And the other cleared his voice, and then went on more firmly.

"Yes, Gilbert, the old roof-tree, and the broad acres, shall all be yours, and long may you live to enjoy them. That is now the dearest wish left me on earth."

"But the proviso, sir, of which you spoke just now?" said the young man, whose curiosity was all aflame.

"The proviso is this: That should you not live to be seventy years of age, the estate, and all pertaining to it, shall pass away from you and yours at your death, and go to your cousin, the son of my brother Henry; or to his heirs, should he not be alive at the time. But should you overpass your seventieth birthday, though it be but by twelve short hours, the estate will remain yours, to will away to whom you please, or to dispose of as you may think best."

Gilbert Denison stared into his uncle's face, with eyes which plainly said, "Are you crazy, or are you not?"

"No, Gilbert, I am not mad, however much, at this first moment, you may be inclined to think me so," said Mr. Denison with a faint smile, as he laid his fingers caressingly on the young man's arm. "I told you before, that I had not done this thing without due thought and deliberation. It is the only mode I can think of to save you from yourself, to tear you away from this terrible life of dissipation, and to make a man of you, such as I and your father, were he now alive, would like you to become. I have given you something to live for; I have put before you the strongest inducement I can think of to reform your ways. Once on a time you had a splendid constitution, and seventy is not a great age for a Denison to reach. In due time you will probably marry and have a son. That son may be left little better off than a pauper should his father not live to see his seventieth birthday. If I cannot induce you to take care of your health for your own sake, I will try to induce you to do so for the sake of those who will come after you. Heaven only knows whether my plan will succeed. Our poor purblind schemes are but feeble makeshifts at the best."

"In case I should fall in the hunting-field, sir, or—?"

"Or come to such an untimely end as I have come to, eh? Should you meet with your death by accident, and not by your own hand, the special stipulation in the will which I have just explained to you, will become invalid, and of no effect. You will find this and other points duly provided for. Nothing has been forgotten."

There ensued a silence. The sick man suddenly broke it.

"Perhaps some scheme may enter your head, Gilbert, of trying to upset the will after I am dead? But you will find that a difficult matter to do."

"Now, Heaven forbid, sir," cried the young man vehemently, "that such a thought should find harbourage in my brain for a single moment! You think me worse than I am. You do not know me: you have never understood me."

"Do we ever really understand one another in this world? We are so far removed from Heaven, that the lights burn dimly, and we see each other but as shadows walking in the dusk."

At this moment there was a ring below stairs, then a knock at the chamber door, and in came the nurse. The doctor was waiting.

"You had better go now, my boy," said Mr. Denison, pressing Gilbert's hand affectionately. "At ten to-morrow I shall expect to see you again."

Gilbert Denison stood up and took the dying man's fingers within his strong grasp; he gazed with grave, resolute eyes, into the dying man's face. "One moment, sir. As I said before—you do not know me. You have seen one side of me—the weak side—and that is all. If you think that, when I make up my mind to do so, I cannot throw off the trammels of my present life, almost as easily as I cast aside an old coat, then, sir, you are quite and entirely mistaken. That I have been weak and foolish, I fully admit, but it is just possible, sir, that, young as I am, I may have had trials and temptations of which you know nothing. How many men before me have striven to find in reckless dissipation a Lethe for their troubles? Not that I wish to excuse myself: far from it. I only wish you to understand and believe, uncle, that there is a side to my character of which as yet you know nothing."

"I am willing to believe it, Gilbert," was the answering murmur: and once more the young man pressed Mr. Denison's hand to his lips.

When Gilbert Denison called in Bloomsbury Square the following morning, he found his uncle much weaker, and more exhausted. Mr. Denison was evidently sinking fast. Gilbert stayed with him till the end. A little while before that end came, he drew his nephew down to him, and spoke in a whisper:

"Never forget the motto of your family, my boy: 'What I have, I hold.'"

And before the sun rose again, Gilbert Denison the younger was master of Heron Dyke, with an income of six thousand a year.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. CARLYON AT HOME.

FORTY-FIVE years, with all their manifold changes, had come and gone since Squire Denison, of Heron Dyke, died in his lodgings in Bloomsbury Square, London.

It was the height of the London season, and at Mrs. Carlyon's house at Bayswater a small party were assembled in honour of the twenty-first birthday of her niece, Miss Ella Winter. Mrs. Carlyon, who had been a widow for several years, was still a handsome woman, although she could count considerably more than forty summers. Her house was a good one, pleasantly situated, and well furnished. She kept her brougham and half a dozen servants, and nothing pleased her better than to see herself surrounded by young people. Most enjoyable to her were those times when Miss Winter was allowed by

her great-uncle, the present Squire Denison, of Heron Dyke, to exchange for a few weeks the quietude of the country for the gaieties of Bayswater and the delights of the London season. Such visits, however, were few and far between, and were appreciated accordingly.

To-day some ten or a dozen friends were dining with Mrs. Carlyon. One of them was little Freddy Bootle, with his little fluffy moustache, his eye-glass, and his short-cut flaxen hair parted down the middle. Freddy was universally acknowledged to be one of the best hearted fellows in the world, and one of the most easily imposed upon. He was well connected, and was a junior partner in the great East-end brewery firm of Fownes, Bootle and Bootle. He was in love with Miss Winter, and had proposed to her a year ago. Although unsuccessful in his suit, his feelings remained unchanged, and he was not without hope that Ella would one day look on him with more favourable eyes. Ella and he remained the best of friends. That little episode of the declaration in the conservatory, which to him had been so momentous an affair, had been to her no more than a passing vexation.

Another of the gentlemen whom it may be as well to introduce, is Philip Cleeve, son of Lady Cleeve, of Homedale, near Nullington. He and Miss Winter are great friends. Philip is in love with Maria Kettle, the only daughter of the Vicar of Nullington. What a handsome fellow he is, with his brown curling hair, his laughing hazel eyes, and his ever-ready smile. Ella sometimes wonders how Maria Kettle can resist his pleasant manners and fascinating ways. There is no more general favourite anywhere than Philip Cleeve. The worst his friends said of him was that he was given to be a little careless in money matters—and his purse was a very slender one. Between ourselves, Philip was sometimes hard up for pocket money: though, perhaps, these same friends suspected it not.

Dinner was over, and the ladies had returned to the drawing-room, when Mrs. Carlyon was called downstairs, and a couple of minutes later Ella was sent for. A gentleman had called, Captain Lennox, bringing with him a birthday gift for Ella, from Mr. Denison, of Heron Dyke. The Captain had accidentally met Mr. Denison the day previous, and happening to mention that he was about to run up to London on a flying visit, the latter had asked him to take charge of and deliver to his niece, a certain little parcel which he did not feel quite easy about entrusting to the post. This parcel the Captain now delivered into Ella's hands. On being opened, the contents proved to be a pair of diamond and pearl ear-rings.

Mrs. Carlyon at once gave Captain Lennox a cordial invitation to join the party upstairs, which he as cordially accepted. They had never met before; but Ella had some acquaintance with the Captain and his widowed sister, who lived with him in Norfolk. The Captain and his sister had come strangers to Nullington some six

months previously, and finding the place to their liking, had, after a fortnight's sojourn at an hotel, taken The Lilacs, a pretty cottage ornée. Captain Lennox was a tall, thin, fair-haired man about forty years of age. He had clear-cut aquiline features, wore a moustache and long whiskers, and was always faultlessly dressed.

"How was my uncle looking, Captain Lennox?" asked Ella, somewhat anxiously, when the ear-rings had been duly examined and admired.

"Certainly quite as well as I ever saw him look."

"I am glad of that. I had a letter from him three days ago, in which he said that he had not felt better for years. But that is a phrase he nearly always makes use of when he writes to me. He does it to satisfy me. When his health is in question, Uncle Gilbert's statements are sometimes to be taken with a grain of salt."

"Now that Captain Lennox has assured you that your uncle is no worse than usual, you can afford to give me another week at Bayswater," said Mrs. Carlyon.

Ella smiled, and shook her head. "I must go back next Monday without fail."

"You are as obstinate as the Squire himself," cried her aunt. "I have a great mind to write and tell him that he need not expect you before the twentieth."

"He will expect me back on the thirteenth," said Ella. "And I would not disappoint him for a great deal."

"Well, well, you must have your own way, I suppose. All the same, it is a great deprivation to me. But those good people upstairs will think I am lost, so come along, both of you."

At this juncture a fresh arrival was announced. It was Mr. Conroy, special artist and correspondent for "The Illustrated Globe," whose vivid letters from the seat of war had been so widely read of late. Mrs. Carlyon received him with warmth. "I hope you have brought some of your sketches with you, as you so kindly promised," she said, when greetings were over.

"My portfolio is in the hall," he replied. "But you must not expect to see anything very finished. In fact, my sketches are all in the rough, just as I jotted them down immediately after the events I have attempted to pourtray."

"That will only serve to render them the more interesting. They will seem like veritable pulsations of that awful struggle," said Mrs. Carlyon, as she rang the bell and ordered the portfolio to be brought upstairs. Then she introduced Conroy to her niece, Miss Winter: and he gave a perceptible start.

"They have met before," thought Captain Lennox to himself. He was looking on from his seat close by, and he watched keenly for a gleam of recognition between them. But no such look came into the eyes of either. The Captain, who had a keen nose for anything not above board, turned the matter over in his mind.

"That start had a meaning in it," he mused. "There's more under the surface than shows itself at present."

Conroy never forgot the picture that stamped itself on his memory the first moment he set eyes on Ella Winter. He saw before him a tall, slender girl, whose gait and movements were as free and stately as those of a queen. She had hair of the colour of chestnuts when at their ripest, and large luminous eyes of darkest blue. The eyebrows were thick and nearly straight, and darker in colour than her hair. Her face was a delightful one in the mingled expression of gravity and sweetness—the gravity was often near akin to melancholy—that habitually rested upon it. A forehead broad, but not very high; a straight, clear-cut nose with delicate nostrils; lips that were, perhaps, a trifle over-full, but that lacked nothing of purpose and decision; a firm, rounded chin with one dainty dimple in it: such was Ella Winter as first seen by Edward Conroy. This evening she wore a dress of rich but sober-tinted marone, relieved with lace of a creamy white. "I have often wished to see her," muttered Conroy to himself. "Now I have seen her, and I am satisfied."

Mrs. Carlyon had the portfolio taken into her boudoir so as to be clear of the music and conversation in the larger room, and there a little group gathered round to examine and comment upon the sketches, and to listen to Conroy's few direct words of explanation whenever any such were needed.

Ella stood and looked on, listening to Mr. Conroy's remarks and to the comments of those around her, and only giving utterance to a monosyllable now and then. "This man differs, somehow, from other men," was her unspoken thought. "He is a man carved out by hand; not one of a thousand turned out by lathe, and all so much alike that you cannot tell one from another. He has individuality. He interests me."

She was taking but little apparent interest in what was going on before her; but, for all that, she lost no word that was said. She stood, fan in hand, her arms crossed before her, her fingers interknit, her eyes, with a look of grave sweet inquiry in them, bent on Conroy's face. "Aunt shall ask him to leave his portfolio till to-morrow," she thought, "and after these people are gone I can have his sketches all to myself."

Conroy was indeed of a different mould from those butterflies of fashion who ordinarily fluttered around Miss Winter. He was certainly not a handsome man, in the general acceptation of the term. His face was dark and somewhat rugged for a man still young, but lined with thought, and instinct with energy. He had seen his twenty-eighth birthday, but looked older. Edward Conroy had gone through much hardship and many dangers in the pursuit of his profession. Already his black hair was growing thin about the temples, and was streaked here and there with a fine line of grey. The predominent expression of his face was determination. He looked like a man not easily moved—whom, indeed, it would be almost

impossible to move when once he had made up his mind to a certain course. And yet his face was one that women and children seemed to trust intuitively. At times a wonderful softness, an expression of almost feminine tenderness, would steal into his dark brown eyes. Tears had nothing to do with it: he was a man to whom tears were unknown. The sweetest springs are those which lie farthest from the surface and are the most difficult to reach. From the first, Ella felt that she had to contend against a will that was stronger than her own. From the first she could not help looking up to, and deferring to Edward Conroy, as she had never deferred to any man but her uncle. Probably she liked him none the less for that.

When Conroy's sketches had been looked at and commented upon, the majority of the company went back into the drawing-room. Dancing now began, and Ella found herself engaged to one partner after another. Conroy sat down in a corner of the boudoir next to old-fashioned, plain-looking Miss Wallace, whom nobody seemed to notice much, and was soon deep in conversation with her. Ella was annoyed two or three times at detecting herself looking round the room and wondering what had become of him. Somehow she seemed to pay less attention than usual to the small talk of her partners. They found her indifferent and distrait. "She may be rich, and she may be handsome," remarked young Pawson, of the Guards, to one of his friends, "but she is not the kind of woman that I should care to marry. She has a way of freezing a fellow and making him feel small; and that's uncomfortable, to say the least of it."

By-and-by Conroy strolled into the drawing-room, and Captain Lennox, who happened to be watching Ella at the time, saw the sudden light that leapt into her eyes the moment she caught sight of his form in the doorway. "She's interested in him already," muttered the Captain to himself. "This Mr. Conroy is playing some deep game or I am very much mistaken. I wonder where he has met her before?"

"How do you think my niece is looking?" asked Mrs. Carlyon of Captain Lennox, a little later on, as she glanced fondly at Ella.

"Uncommonly well," replied the Captain. "She always does look well."

"Ah no, not always. She was not looking well when she came to me."

Captain Lennox considered. He also glanced across at Ella. "I have noticed one thing, Mrs. Carlyon—that she has at times a strangely grave look in her eyes for one so young. It is as if she had something or other in her thoughts that she finds it difficult to forget."

"That is just where the matter lies. How *can* she forget? Since that strange affair that happened last February at Heron Dyke ——"

"Oh, that was a regular mystery," interrupted the Captain, aroused to eager interest. "It is one still."

"And it has left its effects upon poor Ella. A mystery: yes, you are right in calling it so; sure never was a greater mystery enacted in melodrama. Ella's stay with me has, no doubt, benefited her in a degree, but I am sure it lies in her thoughts almost night and day."

"Well, it was a most unaccountable thing. I fancy it troubles Mr. Denison."

"It must trouble all who inhabit Heron Dyke. For myself, I do not think I could bear to live there. Were it my home I should leave it."

Captain Lennox stroked his fair whiskers in surprise. "Leave it!" he exclaimed. "Leave Heron Dyke!"

"*I* should. I should be afraid to stay. But then I am a woman, and women are apt to be timorous. If—if Katherine ——"

Mrs. Carlyon broke off with a shiver. She rose from her seat and moved away, as though the subject were getting too much for her.

A strange mystery it indeed was, as the reader will confess when he shall hear its particulars later. But it was not the greatest mystery enacted, or to be enacted, at Heron Dyke.

"I have a favour to ask you, Mr. Conroy," began Ella, when they found themselves apart from the rest for a moment.

"You have but to name it," he answered, a smile in his speaking eyes as they glanced into hers.

"Will you let your portfolio remain here until to-morrow? I want to look at the sketches all by myself."

"They interest you?"

"Very much indeed. How I should like to have been in Paris during that terrible siege!"

"You ought to be thankful that you were a hundred miles away from it."

"But surely I might have been of some sort of use. I could have nursed among the wounded—or helped to distribute food to the starving—or read to the dying. I should have found something to do, and have done it."

"Still I cannot help saying that you were much better away. You can form but a faint idea of the terror and agony of that awful time."

"But there were women who went through it all, and why should not I have done the same? My life seems so useless—so purposeless. I feel as if I had been sent into a world where there was nothing left for me to do!"

"So long as poverty and sickness, want and misery abound, there is surely enough to do for earnest workers of every kind."

"But how to set about doing it? I feel as if my hands were tied, and as if I could not cut the cord that binds me."

"And yet your life is not without its interests. Your uncle for instance ——"

"You have heard about my uncle!" she said, in her quick way, looking at him with a little surprise.

"Yes, I have heard of Mr. Denison, of Heron Dyke. There is nothing very strange in that."

"Ah, yes, I think I am of some use to him," said Ella, softly. "I could not leave Uncle Gilbert for anything or anybody. And I have my school in the village, and two or three poor old people to look after. My life is not altogether an empty one; but what I do seems so small and trifling in comparison with what I think I should like to do. After all, these may be only the foolish longings of an ignorant girl who has seen little or nothing of the world."

Mr. Bootle came up and claimed Ella's hand for the next dance. The special correspondent's face softened as he looked after her.

"What a sweet creature she is!" he said to himself. "To-morrow I will try to sketch her face from memory."

Philip Cleeve was one of the earliest to leave. He had complained of a severe headache for the last hour, and had scarcely danced at all. A little later Mr. Bootle and Captain Lennox went off arm-in-arm. They had never met before this evening, but they seemed to have taken a mutual liking to one another. When Conroy took his leave, Mrs. Carlyon invited him to call again: and he silently promised himself it should be before Ella Winter's departure for Norfolk. But, as circumstances fell out, it was a promise he could not keep.

Two o'clock was striking as Mrs. Carlyon sat down on her dressing-room sofa after the departure of her last guest. Taking out her earrings, she handed them to her maid, Higson.

"I am glad things passed off nicely," she remarked to Ella, who had stepped in for a few moments' chat. "All the same, I am not sorry it's over," she added, with a sigh of weariness.

"Neither am I," acknowledged Ella. "It would take me a long while to get used to your London hours, Aunt Gertrude."

"That's a pleasant man, that Captain Lennox, Ella. Very fashionable, I see; but he—Higson, what in the world are you fidgeting about?" Mrs. Carlyon broke off to ask.

"I am looking for your jewel-case, ma'am," was the maid's rejoinder; "I can't see it anywhere. Perhaps you have put it away?" she added, turning to her mistress.

"I have neither seen it nor touched it since I dressed for dinner," said Mrs. Carlyon. "It was on the dressing-table then. I daresay you have put it somewhere yourself."

Higson, the patient, knew she had not, though she made no reply. She continued her search, Ella turning to help her. The maid's face gradually acquired a look of consternation.

"It is certainly not here, aunt," cried Ella.

"What's that, my dear?" asked Mrs. Carlyon, with a start, rousing

herself from the half-doze into which she had fallen. "I say that Higson must have forgotten what she did with it."

But Higson had not. She assured her mistress that the jewel-box was left on the dressing-table. At nine o'clock, when she went in to prepare the room for the night, she saw it there, safe and untouched.

Without another word, Mrs. Carlyon set to work herself. The dressing-room had two doors, one of which opened into Mrs. Carlyon's bed-room, while the other opened into the boudoir where the little group had assembled to examine Mr. Conroy's sketches. After searching the dressing-room thoroughly, and convincing herself that the case was not there, the bed-room was submitted to a similar process with a like result.

Mrs. Carlyon grew alarmed. The case had contained jewels of the value of more than three hundred pounds, besides certain souvenirs pertaining to dear ones whom she had lost, which no money could have bought. As a last resource the boudoir was searched, although it was difficult to imagine how the jewel-case could by any possibility have found its way there. Satisfied, at length, that further search, for the present at all events, was useless, Mrs. Carlyon sat down with despair at her heart and tears in her eyes. "Are the servants gone to bed yet?" she asked.

Higson thought not. When she came up, they were clearing away the refreshments.

"Go and call them," said her mistress, rather sharply. "But don't say what for."

"Higson seems regularly put out," observed Ella, when the maid was gone.

"Well she may be," said Mrs. Carlyon. "She is a faithful creature, and has been with me nearly a dozen years. *All* my servants are faithful, and have lived with me more or less a prolonged time," she added, emphatically. "I could never suspect one of them; but it is right they should be questioned. I could trust them with all I possess."

The servants filed in, five or six of them, one after another: an expression on each face which seemed to ask, "Why are we wanted here at this uncanny hour?"

In a few quiet sentences Mrs. Carlyon detailed her loss, and questioned each of them in turn as to whether they could throw any light on the affair. One and all denied all knowledge of it: as indeed their mistress had quite expected that they would do. No one save Higson had set foot either in the bed-room or dressing-room since ten o'clock the previous forenoon. There was nothing for it but to let them go back. Higson, who was crying by this time, was told a few minutes later that she too had better go: Mrs. Carlyon would to-night undress herself. The woman went out with her apron to her eyes.

"I shan't get a wink of sleep all this blessed night," she cried with a sob. "Hanging would be too good, ma'am, for them that have robbed you."

Mrs. Carlyon and Ella sat and looked at each other. The uncertainty was growing painfully oppressive. Had there been any strange waiters in the house, they might have been suspected: but, except on some very rare and grand occasion, Mrs. Carlyon employed only her own servants. And those servants were above suspicion.

"Was the door that opens from the dressing-room into the boudoir locked, or otherwise?" asked Ella.

"To my certain knowledge it was locked till past ten o'clock: and I will tell you how I happen to know it," replied Mrs. Carlyon. "Sometime after the exhibition of Mr. Conroy's sketches I went into the boudoir and found it empty of everybody except Philip Cleeve; he was lying on the sofa with one of his bad headaches. Thinking that my salts might be of service to him, I came into the dressing-room to get them. I have a clear recollection of finding the door between the two rooms locked then. I unlocked it, and having found the salts, I went back and gave them to Philip; but whether I relocked the door after me is more than I can say. Probably I did not. After a few words to Philip I left him, still lying on the sofa, and did not go near the boudoir again.

A pause ensued. It seemed as if there was nothing more to be said. Not the slightest shadow of suspicion could rest on Philip Cleeve; the idea was preposterous. Both the ladies had known him since he was a boy, and his mother, Lady Cleeve, was one of Mrs. Carlyon's oldest friends. And, that suspicion could attach itself to any of the guests, was equally out of the question. Still, the one strange fact remained, that the casket could not be found.

"We had better go to bed, I think," said Mrs. Carlyon at last, in a fretful voice. "If we sit up all night the case won't come back to us of its own accord."

"I am ready to say with Higson that I shan't get a wink of sleep," remarked Ella, as she rose to obey. "One thing seems quite certain, Aunt Gertrude—that there must be a thief somewhere."

CHAPTER III.

CAPTAIN LENNOX STARTLED.

THERE were other people beside Mrs. Carlyon who had cause to remember the night of Ella Winter's birthday party.

As already stated, Captain Lennox and Mr. Bootle left the house together. They were walking along, arm-in-arm, smoking their cigars, when whom should they run against but Philip Cleeve, who had bid them good-night half an hour before.

"Why, Phil, my boy, what are you doing here?" cried Mr. Bootle. "I thought you were off to roost long ago."

"I am taking a quiet stroll before turning in," answered Philip. "I thought the cool night air would do my head good, and I'm happy to say it has."

"Then you can't do better than come along to my hotel with Mr. Bootle," said Lennox. "Let us have one last bottle of champagne together."

Freddy seconded the proposition; and Philip, who seldom wanted much persuasion where pleasure was concerned, yielded after a minute's hesitation. He had come up to London for a few days' holiday, and there was no reason why he should not enjoy himself.

A cab was called, and the three gentlemen presently found themselves at the Captain's rooms. There they sat chatting, and smoking, and drinking champagne, till the clock on the chimney-piece chimed the half hour past two. By this time they had all had more wine than was good for them, Mr. Bootle especially so, while Philip was, perhaps, the coolest of the three.

"We'll see him into a hansom and then we shall be sure that he will get home all right," whispered Lennox to Philip as they assisted Freddy downstairs.

A hansom being quickly found, Mr. Bootle was safely stowed inside and the requisite instructions given to the driver. Then they all shook hands and bade each other good-night with a promise to meet again next afternoon.

It was near noon the next day, and Freddy Bootle was still in bed, when some one knocked at his door, and Captain Lennox entered the room, looking well, but lugubrious.

"Not up yet!" he said, in anything but a cheerful voice. "I breakfasted three hours ago."

"My head is like a lump of lead," moaned Freddy, "and my tongue is as dry as a parrot's."

"Have you any soda; and where's your liqueur-case? I'll concoct you a dose that will put you right."

"You'll find lots of things in the other room: but Lennox, how fresh *you* look. You might never have had a headache in your life."

"You are not so well seasoned as I am," returned Captain Lennox. "What business do you suppose has brought me here?"

"Not the remotest idea; unless it is to gaze on the wretched object before you."

"Oh, you'll be quite well in an hour or two. Are you aware that I had my pocket picked of my purse while in your company last night——or, rather, early this morning?"

Mr. Bootle stared at his friend in blank surprise, but said nothing.

"It contained all the cash I had with me," continued the Captain;

"and I must ask you to lend me a few pounds to pay my hotel bill and carry me home."

"Was there much in it?"

"A ten pound note, and some gold and silver."

Mr. Bootle was sitting up in bed by this time, his hands pressed to his head, his eyes fixed intently on the Captain. "By Jove!" he said, at last, and there was no mistaking his tone of utter surprise. "Do you know, Lennox, that your telling me about this brings back something to my mind that I had forgotten till now. I think my pocket has been picked. I have a vague recollection of not being able to find my watch and chain when I got home this morning, but I tumbled into bed almost immediately, and thought nothing more of the matter till you spoke now. Just hand me my togs and let me have another search."

Mr. Bootle examined his clothes thoroughly; but both watch and chain were gone. The two men looked at each other in dismay. "It was the governor's watch," said Freddy, dismally, "and I am uncommonly sorry it's gone. Bad luck to the wretch who took it!"

"You had better get up and have some breakfast, and then we'll go down to Scotland Yard. The police may be able to trace it into the hands of some pawnbroker."

"I shall never see the old watch again," said Mr. Bootle, with a melancholy shake of the head. "And as for breakfast—don't mention the word."

At this juncture, Philip Cleeve came in, looking none the worse for last night's vigil. The story of the double loss was at once poured into his ears by Freddy. Captain Lennox noticed how genuinely surprised he looked.

"*You* lost nothing, I suppose?" asked the Captain, in a grumbling tone, as if he could not get over his own loss.

"Why, no," said Philip, with a laugh. "I had nothing about me worth taking—only a little loose silver and this ancient turnip—a family relic, three or four generations old." As he spoke he drew from his pocket a large old-fashioned silver watch, of the kind our great grandfathers used to carry, and held it up for inspection. "Almost big enough for a family clock, is it not?" he asked, with another laugh, as he put it away again.

There was silence for a minute or two, Lennox seeming lost in a reverie. Then he turned to Bootle. "Do you recollect at what time during the evening you looked at your watch last?"

"My memory as to what happened during the latter part of the evening is anything but clear," said Freddy. "I seem to have a hazy recollection of pulling out my watch and looking at it when the clock in your room chimed something or other."

"That would be half-past two," interrupted Lennox.

"But I can't be quite sure on the point. How about your purse?—portemonnaie, or what it was?"

"As to that, I only know that I missed it first when I came to undress. I might have been relieved of it hours before, or only a few minutes."

"Don't you remember two or three rough-looking fellows hustling past us," asked Philip, "as we stood talking for a minute or two at the street corner just before Bootle got into the cab?"

Lennox shook his head. "I can't say that I recollect the circumstance you speak of," he answered.

"But I recollect the affair quite well," said Philip, positively. "One of the men nearly hustled me into the gutter. Nasty low-looking fellows they were. I think it most likely that they were the pickpockets."

The Captain shrugged his shoulders, remarking that all he knew was that his money was gone; he crossed the room, and began to stare out of the window. Freddy Bootle was looking dreadfully uncomfortable.

"I am sorry that I can't join you fellows at dinner to-day," said Cleeve. "From a letter I received this morning I find I must get back home."

"Oh! nonsense!" both of them interrupted. "That won't do, Cleeve."

"It must do. My mother has written for me. She's ill."

"You can go down the first thing to-morrow," said Captain Lennox.

"A few hours can't make much difference," added Bootle.

Philip shook his head. "When it comes to the mother writing, and confessing she is ill—which she never will confess—I know she *is* ill; and she expects me. Perhaps I'll look in again on my way to the train," added Philip, as he went out. "I have a call or two to make first."

In the course of the day the Captain and Mr. Bootle went down to Scotland Yard and reported their losses: though they both seemed to feel that their doing so was little better than a farce. They dined together afterwards, and went to the theatre.

Next day the Captain's brief visit came to an end, and he travelled back into Norfolk.

The evening clock was striking nine as Captain Lennox reached Nullington station. He secured the solitary fly in waiting, and told the driver to take him to Heron Dyke. Late though it was, he thought he would tell the Squire that his gift had reached Miss Winter safely. What with this robbery and that, it behoved people to be cautious. Dismissing the fly when he reached the gates of Heron Dyke, Captain Lennox took out his cane and a small hand-bag, and rang at the door.

Everything looked dark about the old house. There was not a glimmer of light anywhere. The shrill clang of the bell broke the death-like silence rudely. Presently came the sound of footsteps, and then a man's voice could be heard as he grumbled and muttered to himself, while two or three heavy bolts were slowly, and, as it were,

reluctantly withdrawn. "It's old Aaron Stone, and he's in a deuce of a temper, as he always is," said the Captain to himself. The great oaken door seemed to groan as it turned on its hinges. It was only opened to the extent of a few inches, and was still held by the heavy chain inside.

"Who are you, and what do you mean by disturbing honest folk at this time o' night?" queried a harsh voice from within.

"I am Captain Lennox. I have just returned from London, and I should like a few words with the Squire, if not too late."

"The Squire never sees anybody at this time o' night. You had better come in the morning, Captain."

"I cannot come in the morning. I have a message for Mr. Denison from his niece, Miss Winter."

"Why couldn't you say so at first?" grumbled the old man. He seemed to hesitate for a moment or two; then he turned on his heel and went slowly away down the echoing corridor; a distant door was heard to shut, and after that all was silence again.

Captain Lennox turned away and whistled a few bars under his breath. The night was cloudy, and few stars were visible. Here and there one of the huge clumps of evergreens, in front of the house, was dimly discernible; and against the background of clouded sky, the black outlines of the seven tall poplars, that stood on the opposite side of the lawn, were clearly defined. A brooding quiet seemed to rest over the whole place, except that every now and then, borne from afar, came the sound of a faint murmurous monotone, at once plaintive and soothing. It was the voice of the incoming tide, as it washed softly up the distant sands.

Captain Lennox shivered, although the night was warm and oppressive. "What a dismal place!" was his thought. "I would far sooner live in my own pretty little cottage than in this big, rambling, draughty, haunted old house—and it has a haunted look, if house ever had——and it *is*, if all tales are true. What was that?" he asked himself, with a start. It seemed to him that he had heard the sound of stealthy footsteps behind him. His fingers tightened on his cane, and he peered cautiously around: but nothing was to be seen or heard. Again came the noise of a far-off door, and again the sound of slow, heavy footsteps across the stone-floor of the hall. Next minute the chain was unloosed, and the great door opened a few inches wider. Then was the rugged face and bent form of old Aaron Stone discernible, as he cautiously held the door with one hand, while the other held a lighted lantern.

"You may come in," he said, in ungracions accents. "As you have brought a message from Miss Ella, the Squire will see you; but it's gone nine o'clock, Captain, and he never likes to be kept up past his time—ten."

Captain Lennox stepped inside, and the door behind him was rebolted and chained. The dim light from the lantern flung fantastic

shadows on wall and ceiling as Aaron went slowly along, but left other things in semi-darkness. At the end of a passage leading from the opposite side of the hall was a door, which the old man opened with a pass-key, and they turned to the right along a narrower passage, into which several rooms opened. At one of these doors Aaron halted, opened it, and announced Captain Lennox.

The room into which Lennox was ushered, after leaving his hand-bag and cane outside, was a large apartment, with a sort of sombre stateliness about it which might be imposing, but which was certainly anything but cheerful. Cheerful, indeed, on the brightest day in summer it was hardly possible that this room could be. Its panelled walls were black with age. Here and there a family portrait, dim and faded, and incrusted with the accumulated grime of generations, stared out at you with ghostly eyes from the more ghostly depths of blackness behind it. Whatever colour the ceiling might once have been, it was now one dull pervading hue of dingy brown. Two or three Indian rugs on the floor; a bureau carved with leaves and flowers, from the midst of which, queer faces peeped out; two or three tables with twisted legs; an Oriental jar or two, and a few straight-backed chairs, formed, with two exceptions, the sole furniture of the room. The windows were high and narrow, and three in number. They were filled with small lozenge-shaped panes of thick greenish glass, set in lead; through which even the brightest summer sunlight penetrated with a chastened lustre, as though it were half afraid to venture inside. It was night now, and in the silver sconces over the chimney-piece, and in the silver candlesticks on one of the tables, some half-dozen wax-candles were alight; but in that big gloomy room their feeble flame seemed to do little more than make darkness visible. High up in the middle window was the family escutcheon in painted glass, and below it a scroll with the family motto: *What I have, I hold.*

The two exceptions to the furniture were these: a high screen of dark stamped leather, the figures on which, originally gilt, showed nothing more than a patch here and there of their whilom lustre; and a huge chair, which was also covered with the same dark leather. In this chair was seated the Master of Heron Dyke. The screen was drawn up behind him, and although the evening was close on midsummer, in the big open fireplace, in front of which he was sitting, the stump of a tree was slowly burning; crackling and sputtering noisily every now and then, as though defying till the last the flames that were gradually eating it away.

Gilbert Denison sat in this huge leather chair, propped up with cushions, his legs and feet covered with a bear-skin. The reader at first might hardly have believed him to be the fine young fellow he saw in London, sitting by his uncle's death-bed, Gilbert the elder. But forty-five years suffice to change all of us. He was a very tall, lean, gaunt old man now: so lean, indeed, that there seemed to be

little more of him than skin and bone. His head was covered with a black velvet skull-cap, underneath which his long white hair straggled almost on his shoulders. He had bold, clearly-cut features, and must, at one time, have been a man of striking appearance. His cheeks had now fallen in, and his long, straight nose looked pinched and sharp. His white eyebrows were thick and heavy, but the eyes below them gleamed out with a strange, keen, crafty sort of intelligence, that was hardly pleasant to see in one so old. He was clad, this evening, in a dressing-gown of thick grey duffel, from the sleeves of which appeared two bony hands; their long fingers were just now clutching the arms of the easy-chair, as though they never meant to loosen their hold again. Finally, on one lean, yellow finger gleamed a splendid cat's-eye ring, set with brilliants.

Captain Lennox walked slowly forward till he stood close by the invalid's chair: for an invalid Mr. Denison was, and had been for years. The latter spoke first. "So—so! You have got back from town, eh, and brought me a message from my little girl?" said he, looking up at his visitor with sharp, crafty eyes. "I hope that the London smoke and London hours have not quite robbed her of her country roses? But sit down—sit down."

"Miss Winter could hardly look better than when I saw her the day before yesterday," replied Captain Lennox. "She desired me to present her dearest love to you, and to tell you that she would not fail to be back at Heron Dyke on Monday evening next."

"I knew she would be back to her time," chuckled the Squire. "Though, for that matter, she might have stayed another fortnight had she wanted to."

He had a harsh, creaking, high-pitched voice, as though there were some hidden hinges somewhere that needed oiling; and it was curious to note that Aaron Stone's voice, probably from listening to that of his master for so many years, had acquired something of the same harsh, high-pitched tone, only with more of an inherent grumble in it. At a little distance, a person not in the habit of hearing either of them speak frequently, might readily have mistaken one voice for the other.

"I fancy, sir," said the Captain, "that Miss Winter is never so happy as when at Heron Dyke. She strikes me as being one of those exceptional young ladies who care but little for the gaieties and distractions of London life."

"Aye, the girl's been happy enough here under the old roof-tree of her forefathers. She has been brought up on our wild east coast, and our cold sea winds have made her fresh and rosy. She is not one of your town-bred minxes who find no happiness out of a ball-room or a boudoir. But she is a child no longer, and girls at her age have sometimes queer fancies and desires, that come and go beyond their own control. There have been times of late when I have fancied my pretty one has moped a little. Maybe, her wings

begin to flutter, and to her young eyes the world seems wide and beautiful, and the old nest to grow duller and darker day by day."

His voice softened wonderfully as he spoke thus of Ella. He sat and stared at the burning log, his chin resting on his breast. For the moment he had forgotten that he was not alone.

Captain Lennox waited a minute and then coughed gently behind his hand. The Squire turned his head sharply. "Bodikins! I'd forgotten all about you," he said. "Well, I'm glad you've called to-night, Captain, though if you had come much later I should have been between the blankets. We are early birds at the Dyke. And she was looking well, was she!—forgetting a bit, may be, the trouble here. You gave my little present safely into her hands, eh?"

"I did not fail to deliver it speedily, as I had promised. Miss Winter will tell you herself how delighted she was with its contents."

The Squire chuckled and rubbed his bony hands. "Ay, ay, she was pleased, was she? I shall have half a dozen kisses for it, I'll be bound."

The Captain rose to go. "I thought you would like to hear of her welfare, Squire, or I should not have intruded on you before to-morrow. And also that I had carried your present to her in safety. London seems full of mysterious robberies just now."

"It's always that; always that. I won't ask you to stay now," added the Squire; "you must drop in and see us another time. There's not much company comes to the Dyke nowadays. But at odd times a friend is welcome, eh? I've been thinking lately that perhaps my pretty one would be more lively if she saw more company: she finds it a bit drear, I fancy, since—since that matter in the winter. You, now, are young, but not too young; you have travelled, and seen the world, and you can talk. So you may call—once in a way, you know, eh—why not?"

As soon as Captain Lennox had gone Aaron came in. One by one, he slowly and with much deliberation extinguished the candles in the sconces over the chimney-piece, but not those on the table. He then proceeded to close and bar the shutters of the three high, narrow windows. It was a whim of Mr. Denison to have the windows of whatever room he might be sitting in left uncurtained and unshuttered till the last moment before retiring for the night. "I hate to sit in a room with its eyes shut," he used to say: and he never would do so if he could help it.

The clatter made by Aaron roused Mr. Denison from the reverie into which he had fallen. He lifted his head and watched Aaron bar the shutters of the last window. "As I drove home this afternoon, master," said Aaron, "I saw two strangers loitering about the park gates. They crossed the stile into the Far Meadow when they saw me, and then they slipped away behind the hedges."

"Ay, ay—spies—spies!" said the Squire. "They are at their old tricks again!—I've felt it for weeks. But we'll cheat them yet, Aaron—yes, we'll cheat them yet. Why, only an hour ago, when

it was growing dark, just before you brought in the candles, as I sat looking out of the middle window, all at once I saw a man's face above the garden wall, staring straight into the room. I stared back at it, you may be sure. But at the end of two minutes, or so, I could bear the thing no longer, so I up with my stick and shook it at the face, and next moment it was gone."

"I should like to shoot them—and them that send them!" exclaimed Aaron, viciously.

"They'll prowl about more than ever till the next eleven or twelve months have come and gone," said the Squire. "If they could see my coffin carried across the park to the old church, what a merry show that would be for them!—there'd be no more spying here then. That's ten o'clock striking. Put out the other candles and let us go."

Captain Lennox left the hall, carrying his cane and his little bag, and set off homewards. It was a balmy June evening, and the walk through the park would be a pleasant one. As soon as the door was shut behind him he proceeded to light a cigar, and, after crossing the lawn and the old bridge over the moat, he turned to the left and struck into a narrow footpath through the park, which would prove a shorter cut to the high road than the winding carriage-drive. Darkness and silence were around him : the stars gave but little light. He seemed to follow the pathway by instinct rather than by sight. It was a thinner line of grass that wound like a ribbon through the thicker grass of the park. His own footsteps were all but inaudible to him as he walked.

The pathway took a sudden turn round two gnarled thorn-trees, when all at once, and without a moment's warning, Captain Lennox found himself face to face with a dark-hooded figure—hooded and cloaked from head to foot—which might have sprung out of the ground, so silently and suddenly did it appear to his sight. The Captain, brave man though he was, felt startled, and an involuntary cry escaped his lips. The figure was startled too—it appeared to have been gazing intently at the windows of the house through the branches of the trees—and would have turned to run away. But Captain Lennox took a quiet step forward, and laid his hand upon its shoulder.

"Who are you?—and what are you doing here?" he sternly demanded.

The hood fell back, and in the dim starlight Captain Lennox could just make out the face of a woman, young and pale, her eyes cast pleadingly up to his own.

"Oh, sir, don't hold me!—don't keep me!" was the answer, given in a tone of wailing entreaty, though the voice was one of singular sweetness. "Please let me go!"

"What are you doing here?" he reiterated, still keeping his hold upon her. "What were you peeping at the house for?"

"I am looking for Katherine," whispered the girl. "I come here often to look for her."

"For Katherine!—and who is Katherine?" asked Captain Lennox. But the next moment he remembered the name, as being the one connected with that strange mystery that so puzzled Heron Dyke.

"For my sister," softly repeated the girl. "I do no harm, sir, in coming here to look for her."

"But my good girl, she is not to be seen, you know; she never will be seen," he remonstrated, a shade of compassion in his tone.

"But I do see her," answered the girl, her voice dropped to so low a pitch he could scarcely hear it. "I have seen her once or twice, sir; at her own window."

Perhaps Captain Lennox felt a little taken aback at the words. He did not answer.

"People say she must be dead; I know that," went on the speaker in the same hushed tone. "Even mother says that it must be Katherine's ghost I see. But I think it is herself, sir. I think she is somewhere inside Heron Dyke."

If Captain Lennox felt a shade of something not agreeable creeping over him, he may be excused. The subject altogether bordered on the supernatural.

"My poor girl, had you not better go home and go to bed?" he said, compassionately. "You can do no possible good by wandering about here at this time of night."

"Oh, sir, I must wander; I must find out what has become of her," was the girl's pleading answer. "I can't rest night or day; mother knows I can't. When I go to sleep it is Katherine's voice that wakes me again."

"But ——"

"Hark! what was that?" she suddenly cried out, laying her hand lightly, for protection, on the Captain's arm. And he started again, in spite of himself.

"I heard nothing," he said, after listening a moment.

"There it is again; a second scream. They were two screams, you know sir—*her* screams—I heard that snowy February night."

"But, my good girl, there were no screams to be heard now. It is your imagination. The air is as still as death."

Ere the words were well spoken, the girl was gone. She had vanished silently behind the thorn-trees. And Captain Lennox, after waiting a minute or two, and not feeling any the merrier for the encounter, pursued his walk across the park.

Suddenly, however, as a thought struck him, he turned to look at the windows of the house. They lay in the shade, gloomy and grim, no living person, no light, to be seen in any one of them.

"It is a curious fancy of hers, though," muttered the Captain to himself, as he wheeled round again and went on his way.

(*To be continued.*)

VERENA FONTAINE'S REBELLION.

YOU have been at Timberdale Rectory two or three times before; an old-fashioned, red-brick, irregularly-built house, the ivy clustering on its front walls. It had not much beauty to boast of, but was as comfortable a dwelling-place as any in Worcestershire. The well-stocked kitchen-garden, filled with plain fruit-trees and beds of vegetables, stretched out beyond the little lawn behind it; the small garden in front, with its sweet and homely flowers, opened to the pasture-field that lay between the house and the church.

Timberdale Rectory basked to-day in the morning sun. It shone upon Grace, the rector's wife, as she sat in the bow-window of their usual sitting-room, making a child's frock. Having no little ones of her own to work for—and sometimes Timberdale thought it was that fact that made the rector show himself so crusty to the world in general—she had time, and to spare, to sew for the poor young starvelings in her husband's parish.

"Here he comes at last!" exclaimed Grace.

Herbert Tanerton looked round from the fire over which he was shivering, though it was a warm and lovely April day. A glass of lemonade, or some such cooling drink, stood on the table at his elbow. He was always catching a sore throat—or fancied it.

"If I find the delay has arisen through any neglect of Lee's, I shall report him for it," spoke the rector severely. For, though he had condoned that one great mishap of Lee's, the burning of the letter, he considered it his duty to look sharply after him.

"Oh but, Herbert, it cannot be; he is always punctual," cried Grace. "I'll go and ask."

Mrs. Tanerton left the room, and ran down the short path to the little white gate; poor old Lee, the letterman, was approaching it from the field. Grace glanced at the church clock—three-quarters past ten.

"A break-down on the line, we hear, ma'am," said he, without waiting to be questioned, as he put one letter into her hand. "Salmon has been in a fine way all the morning, wondering what was up."

"Thank you," said Grace, glancing at the letter; "we wondered too. What a beautiful day it is! Your wife will lose her rheumatism now. Tell her I say so."

Back ran Grace. Herbert Tanerton was standing up, impatient for the letter he had been specially expecting, his hand stretched out for it.

"Your letter has not come, Herbert. Only one for me. It is from Alice."

"Oh!" returned Herbert, crustily, as he sat down again to his fire and his lemonade.

Grace ran her eyes quickly over the letter—rather a long one, but very legibly written. Her husband's brother, Jack Tanerton—if you have not forgotten him—had just brought home in safety from another voyage the good ship "Rose of Delhi," of which he was commander. Alice, his wife, who generally voyaged with him, had gone immediately on landing to her mother at New Brighton, near Liverpool; Jack remaining with his ship. This time the ship had been chartered for London, and Jack was there with it.

Grace folded the letter slowly, an expression of pain seated in her eyes. "Would you like to read it, Herbert?" she asked.

"Not now," groaned Herbert, shifting the band of flannel on his throat. "What does she say?"

"She says"—Grace hesitated a moment before proceeding—"she says she wishes Jack could leave the sea."

"I daresay!" exclaimed Herbert. "Now, Grace, I'll not have that absurd notion encouraged. It was Alice's cry last time they were at home; and I told you then I would not."

"I have not encouraged it, Herbert. Of course what Alice says has reason in it: one cannot help seeing that."

"Jack chose the sea as his profession, and Jack must abide by it. A turncoat is never worth a rush. Jack *likes* the sea; and Jack has been successful at it."

"Oh, yes: he's a first-rate sailor," conceded Grace. "It is Alice's wish, no doubt, rather than his. She says here"—opening the letter—"Oh, if Jack could but leave the sea! All my little ones coming on!—I shall not be able to go with him this next voyage. And I come home to find my little Mary and my mother both ill! If we could but leave the sea!"

"I may just as well say 'If I could but leave the Church!'—I'm sure I'm never well in it," retorted Herbert. "Jack had better not talk to me of this: I should put him down at once."

Grace sighed as she took up the little frock again. *She* remembered, though it might suit her husband to forget it, that Jack had not, in one sense of the word, chosen the sea; he had been deluded into it by Aunt Dean, his wife's mother. She had plotted and planned, that woman, for her daughter's advancement, and found out too late that she had plotted wrongly; for Alice chose Jack, and Jack, through her machinations, had been deprived of the greater portion of his birthright. He made a smart sailor; he was steady, and stuck to his duty manfully; never a better merchant commander sailed out of port than John Tanerton. But, as his wife said, her little ones were beginning to grow about her; she had two already; and she could not be with them at New Brighton, and be

skimming over the seas to Calcutta, or where not, in the Rose of Delhi. Interests clashed; and with her whole heart Alice wished Jack could quit the sea. Grace sighed as she thought of this; she saw how natural was the wish, though Herbert did not see it: neither could she forget that the chief portion of the fortune which ought to have been Jack's was enjoyed by herself and her husband. She had always thought it unjust; it did not seem to bring them luck; it lay upon her heart like a weight of care. Their income from the living and the fortune, comprised together, was over a thousand pounds a year. They lived very quietly, not spending, she was sure, anything like half of it; Herbert put by the rest. What good did all the money bring them? But little. Herbert was always ailing, fretful, and grumbling: the propensity to set the world to rights grew upon him: he had ever taken pleasure in *that*, from the time when a little lad he would muffle himself in his step-father's surplice, and preach to Jack and Alice. Poor Jack had to work hard for what he earned at sea; he had only a hundred and fifty pounds a year, besides, of the money that had been his mother's; Herbert had the other six hundred and fifty of it. But Jack, sunny-natured, ever-ready Jack, was just as happy as the day was long.

Lost in these thoughts, her eyes bent on her work, Alice did not see a gentleman who was coming across the field towards the house. The click of the little gate, as it swung to after him, caused her to look up, but hardly in time. Herbert turned at the sound.

"Who's come bothering now, I wonder?"

"I think it is Colonel Letsom," answered Grace.

"Then he must come in here," rejoined Herbert. "I am not going into that cold drawing-room."

Colonel Letsom it was; a pleasant little man with a bald head, who had walked over from his house at Crabb. Grace opened the parlour door, and the Colonel came in and shook hands.

"I want you both to come and dine with me to-night in a friendly way," spoke he; "no ceremony. My brother, the Major, is with us for a day or two, and we'd like to get a few friends together to meet him at dinner."

Herbert Tanerton hesitated. He did not say No, for he liked dinners; he liked the importance of sitting at the right or left hand of his hostess and saying grace. He did not say Yes, for he thought of his throat.

"I hardly know, Colonel. I got up with a sore throat this morning. Very relaxed indeed it is. Who is to be there?"

"Yourselves and the Fontaines and the Todhetleys: nobody else," answered the Colonel. "As to your throat—I daresay it will be better by-and-by. A cheerful dinner will do you good. Six o'clock sharp, mind."

Herbert Tanerton accepted the offer, conditionally. If his throat got worse, of course he should have to send word, and decline. The

Colonel nodded. He felt sure in his own mind the throat would get better: he knew how fanciful the Parson was, and how easily he could be roused out of his ailments.

"How do you like the Fontaines?" questioned he of the Colonel. "Have you seen much of them yet?"

"Oh, we like them very well," answered the Colonel, who, in his easy nature, generally avowed a liking for everybody. "They are connections of my wife's."

"Connections of your wife's!" repeated Herbert quickly. "I did not know that."

"I'm not sure that I knew it myself, until we came to compare notes," avowed the Colonel. "Anyway, I did not remember it. Sir Dace Fontaine's sister married ——. Stop; let me consider—how was it?"

Grace laughed. The Colonel laughed also.

"I know it now. My wife's sister married a Captain Pym: it is many years ago. Captain Pym was a widower, and his first wife was a sister of Dace Fontaine's. Yes, that's it. Poor Pym and his wife died soon; both of them in India: and so, you see, we lost sight of the connection altogether; it slipped out of memory."

"Were there any children?"

"The first wife had one son, who was, I believe, taken to by his father's relatives. That was all. Well, you'll come this evening," added the Colonel, turning to depart. "I must make haste back home, for they don't know yet who's coming and who's not."

A few days previously to this, we had taken up our abode at Crabb Cot, and found that some people named Fontaine had come to the neighbourhood, and were living at Maythorn Bank. Naturally the Squire wanted to know who they were and what they were. And as they were fated to play a conspicuous part in the drama I am about to relate, I must give to them a word of introduction. Important people need it, you know.

Dace Fontaine belonged to the West Indies and was attached to the civil service there. He became judge, or sheriff, or something of the kind; had been instrumental in quelling a riot of the blacks, and was knighted for it. He married rather late in life, in his forty-first year, a young American lady. This young lady's mother—it is curious how things come about!—was first cousin to John Paul, the Islip lawyer. Lady Fontaine soon persuaded her husband to quit the West Indies for America. Being well off, for he had amassed money, he could do as he pleased; and to America they went with their two daughters. From that time they lived sometimes in America, sometimes in the West Indies: Sir Dace would not quite abandon his old home there. Changes came as the years went on: Lady Fontaine died; Sir Dace lost a good portion of his fortune through some adverse speculation. A disappointed man, he resolved to come to England and settle down on some property that had

fallen to him in right of his wife; a small estate called Oxlip Grange, which lay between Islip and Crabb. Anyway, old Paul got a letter, saying they were on the road. However, when they arrived, they found that the tenants at Oxlip Grange could not be got to go out of it without proper notice—which anybody but Sir Dace Fontaine would have known to be reasonable. After some cavilling, the tenants agreed to leave at the end of six months; and the Fontaines went into that pretty little place, Maythorn Bank, then to be let furnished, until the time should expire. So there they were, located close to us at Crabb Cot, Sir Dace Fontaine and his two daughters.

Colonel Letsom had included me in the dinner invitation, for which I felt obliged to him: I was curious to see what the Fontaines were like. Tom Coney said one of the girls was beautiful, lovely—like an angel: the other was a little quick, dark young woman, who seemed to have a will of her own.

We reached Colonel Letsom's betimes—neighbourly fashion. In the country you don't rush in when the dinner's being put on the table; you like to get a chat beforehand. The sunbeams were slanting into the drawing-room as we entered it. Four of the Letsoms were present, besides the Major, and Herbert Tanerton and his wife, for the throat was better. All of us were talking together when the strangers were announced: Sir Dace Fontaine, Miss Fontaine, and Miss Verena Fontaine.

Sir Dace was a tall, heavy man, with a dark, sallow, and arbitrary face; Miss Fontaine was little and pale; she had smooth black hair, and dark eyes that looked straight out at you. Her small teeth were brilliantly white, her chin was pointed. A particularly *calm* face altogether, and one that could boast of little beauty—but I rather took to it.

Did you ever see a fairy? Verena Fontaine looked like nothing else. A small, fair, graceful girl, with charming manners and pretty words. She had the true golden hair, that is so beautiful but so rare, delicate features, and laughing eyes blue as the summer sky. I think her beauty and her attractions altogether took some of us by surprise; me for one. Bob Letsom looked fit to eat her. The sisters were dressed alike, in white muslin and pink ribbons.

How we went in to dinner I don't remember, except that Bob and I brought up the rear together. Sir Dace took Mrs. Letsom, I think, and the Colonel Mrs. Todhetley; and that beautiful girl, Verena, fell to Tod. Tod! The two girls were about the most self-possessed girls I ever saw; their manners quite American. Not their accent: that was good. Major Letsom and Sir Dace fraternised wonderfully: they discovered that they had once met in the West Indies.

After dinner we had music. The sisters sang a duet, and Mary Ann Letsom a song; and Herbert Tanerton sang, forgetting his throat, Grace playing for him; and they made me sing.

The evening soon passed, and we all left together. It was a

warmish night, with a kind of damp smell exhaling from the shrubs and hedges. The young ladies muffled some soft white woollen shawls round their faces, and called our climate a treacherous one. The Parson and Grace said good night, and struck off on the near way to Timberdale; the rest of us kept straight on.

"Why don't your people always live here?" asked Verena of me, as we walked side by side behind the rest. "By something that was said at dinner I gather that you are not here much."

"Mr. Todhetley's principal residence lies at a distance. We only come here occasionally."

"Well, I wish you stayed here always. It would be something to have neighbours close to us. Of course you know the dreadful little cottage we are in—Maythorn Bank?"

"Quite well. It is very pretty, though it is small."

"Small! Accustomed to our large rooms in the western world, it seems to us that we can hardly turn in these. I wish papa had managed better! This country is altogether frightfully dull. My sister tells us that unless things improve she shall take flight back to the States. She *could* do it," added Verena; "she is twenty-one now, and her own mistress."

I laughed. "Is she obliged to be her own mistress because she is twenty-one?"

"She is her own," said Verena. "She has come into her share of the money mamma left us, and can do as she pleases."

"Oh, you were speaking in that sense."

"Partly. Having money, she is not tied. She could go back to-morrow if she liked. We are not bound by your English notions."

"It would not suit our notions at all. English girls cannot travel about alone."

"That comes of their imperfect education. What harm do you suppose could anywhere befal well brought-up girls? We have been self-dependent from childhood; taught to be so. Coral could take care of herself the whole world over, and meet with consideration, wheresoever she might be."

"What do you call her—Coral? It is a very pretty name."

"And coral is her favourite ornament: it suits her pale skin. Her name is really Coralie, but I call her Coral—just as she calls me Vera. Do you like my name—Verena?"

"Very much indeed. Have you read Sintram?"

"Sintram!—no," she answered. "Is it a book?"

"A very nice book, indeed, translated from the German. I will lend it you, if you like, Miss Verena."

"Oh, thank you. I am fond of nice books. Coralie does not care for books as I do. But—I want you to tell me," she broke off, turning her fair face to me, the white cloud drawn round it, and her sweet blue eyes laughing and dancing—"I can't quite make out who you are. They are not your father and mother, are they?"—nodding

to the Squire and Mrs. Todhetley, who were on ever so far in front with Sir Dace.

"Oh no, I only live with them. I am Johnny Ludlow."

II.

Maythorn Bank had not an extensive correspondence as a rule, but three letters were delivered there the following morning. One of the letters was for Verena: which she crushed into her hand in the passage and ran away with to her room. The others, addressed to Sir Dace, were laid by his own man, Ozias, on the breakfast-table to await him.

"The West Indian mail is in, papa," observed Coralie, beginning to pour out the coffee as her father entered. "It has brought you two letters. I think one of them is from George Bazalgette."

Sir Dace wore a rich red silk dressing-gown, well wadded. A large fire burnt in the grate of the small room. He felt the cold here much. Putting his gold eye-glasses across his nose, as he slowly sat down—all his movements were deliberate—he opened the letter his daughter had specially alluded to, and read the few lines it contained.

"What a short epistle!" exclaimed Coralie.

"George Bazalgette is coming over; he merely writes to tell me so," replied Sir Dace. "Verena," he added, for just then Verena entered and wished him good morning, with a beaming face, "I have a letter here from George Bazalgette. He is coming to Europe; coming for you."

A defiant look rose to Verena's bright blue eyes. She opened her mouth to answer; paused; and closed it again without speaking. Perhaps she recalled the saying, "Discretion is the better part of valour." It certainly is, when applied to speech.

Breakfast was barely over when Ozias came in again. He had a copper-coloured face, as queer as his name, but he was a faithful, honest servant, and had lived in the family twenty years. The gardener was waiting for instructions about the new flower-beds, he told his master; and Sir Dace went out. It left his daughters at liberty to talk secrets. How pretty the two graceful little figures looked in their simple morning dresses of delicate print, tied with bows of pale green ribbon.

"I told you I knew George Bazalgette would be coming over, Vera," began Coralie. "His letter by the last mail quite plainly intimated that."

Verena tossed her pretty head. "Let him come! He will get his voyage out and home for nothing. I hope he'll be fearfully sea-sick!"

Not to make a mystery of the matter, which we heard all about later, and which, perhaps, led to that most dreadful crime—but I must not talk of that yet. George Bazalgette was a wealthy West

Indian planter, and wanted to marry Miss Verena Fontaine. She did not want to marry him, and for the very good reason that she intended to marry somebody else. There had been a little trouble about it with Sir Dace; and, alas! there was destined to be a great deal more.

"Shall I tell you what *I* hope, Vera?" answered Coralie, in her matter of fact, unemotional way. "I hope that Edward Pym will never come here, or to Europe at all, to worry you. Better that the sea should swallow him up en voyage."

Verena's beaming face broke into smiles. Her sister's pleasant suggestion went for nothing, for a great joy lay within her.

"Edward Pym *has* come, Coral. The ship has arrived in port, and he has written to me. See!"

She took the morning's letter from the bosom of her dress, and held it open for Coralie to see the date, "London," and the signature "Edward." Had the writer signed his name in full, it would have been Edward Dace Pym.

"How did he know we were here?" questioned Coralie, in surprise.

"I wrote to tell him."

"Did *you* know where to write to him?"

"I knew he had sailed from Calcutta in the *Rose of Delhi;* we all knew that; and I wrote to him to the address of the ship's brokers at Liverpool. The ship has come on to London, it seems, instead of Liverpool, and they must have sent my letter up there."

"If you don't take care, Vera, some trouble will come of this. Papa will never hear of Edward Pym. That's my opinion."

She was as cool as were the cucumbers growing outside in the garden, under the glass shade. Verena was the opposite—all excitement; though she did her best to hide it. Her fingers were restless; her blushes came and went; the sweet words of the short love-letter were dancing in her heart.

"*My darling Vera, the ship is in; I am in London with her, and I have your dear letter. How I wish I could run down into Worcestershire! That cannot be just yet: our skipper will take care to be absent himself, I expect, and I must stay: he is a regular Martinet as to duty. You will see me the very hour I can get my liberty. How strange it is you should be at that place—Crabb! I believe a sort of auut of mine lives there; but I have never seen her. Ever your true lover, Edward.*"

"Who is it—the sort of aunt?" cried Coralie, when Verena had read out the letter; "and what does he mean?"

"Mrs. Letsom, of course. Did you not hear her talking to papa, last night, about her dead sister, who had married Captain Pym?"

"And Edward was the son of Captain Pym's first wife, papa's sister. Then, in point of fact, he is not related to Mrs. Letsom at all. Well, it all happened ages ago," added Coralie, with supreme indifference, "long before our time."

Just so. Edward Pym, grown to manhood now, and chief-mate of the *Rose of Delhi*, was the son of that Captain Pym and his first wife. When Captain Pym died, a relative of his, who had no children of his own, took to the child, then only five years old, and brought him up. The boy turned out anything but good, and when he was fourteen he ran away to sea. He found he had to stick to the sea, for his offended relative would do no more for him: except that, some years later, when he died, Edward found that he was down for five hundred pounds in his will. Edward stayed on shore to spend it, and then went to sea again, this time as first officer in an American brig. Chance, or something else, took the vessel to the West India Islands, and at one of them he fell in with Sir Dace Fontaine, who was, in fact, his uncle, but who had never taken the smallest thought for him—hardly remembered he had such a nephew—and made acquaintance with his two cousins. He and Verena fell in love with one another; and, on her side, at any rate, it was not the passing fancy sometimes called by the name, but one likely to last for all time. They often met, the young officer having the run of his uncle's house whenever he could get ashore; and Edward, who could be as full of tricks and turns as a fox when it suited his convenience to be so, contrived to put himself into hospital when the brig was about to sail, saying he was sick; so he was left behind. The brig fairly off, Mr. Edward Pym grew well again, and looked to have a good time of idleness and love-making. But he reckoned without his host. A chance word, dropped inadvertently, opened the eyes of Sir Dace to the treason around. The first thing he did was to forbid Mr. Edward Pym his house; the second thing was to take passage with his family for America. Never would he allow his youngest and prettiest and best-loved daughter to become the wife of an ill-conducted, penniless ship's mate; and that man a cousin! The very thought was preposterous! So Edward Pym, thrown upon his beam ends, joined a vessel bound for Calcutta. Arrived there, he took the post of chief mate on the good ship *Rose of Delhi*, Captain Tanerton, bound for England.

II.

"What is this nonsense I hear, about your wanting to leave the sea, John?

The question, put in the Rector of Timberdale's repellent, chilly tone, more intensified when anything displeased him, brought only a smile to the pleasant face of his brother. Ever hopeful, sunny-tempered Jack, had reached the rectory the previous night to make a short visit. They sat in the cheerful, bow-windowed room, the sun shining on Jack, as some days before it had shone on Grace; the rector in his easy chair at the fire.

"Well, I suppose it is only what you say, Herbert—nonsense,"

answered Jack, who was playing with the little dog, Dash. "I should like to leave the sea well enough, but I don't see my way clear to do it at present."

"*Why* should you like to leave it?"

"Alice is anxious that I should. She cannot always sail with me now; and there are the little ones to be seen to, you know, Herbert. Her mother is of course—well, very kind, and all that," went on Jack, after an imperceptible pause, "but Alice would prefer to train her children herself; and, to do that, she must remain permanently on shore. It would not be a pleasant life for us, Herbert, she on shore and I at sea."

"Do you ever think of *duty*, John?"

"Of duty? In what way?"

"When a man has deliberately chosen his calling in life, and spent his first years in it, it is his duty to continue in that calling, and to make the best of it."

"I suppose it is, in a general way," said Jack, all smiles and good-humour. "But—if I could get a living on shore, Herbert, I don't see but what my duty would lie in doing it as much as it now lies at sea."

"*You* may not see it, John. Chopping and changing often brings a man to poverty."

"Oh, I'd take care, I hope, not to come to poverty. Down, Dash! Had I a farm of two or three hundred acres, I could make it answer well, if any man could. You know what a good farmer I was as a boy, Herbert—in practical knowledge, I mean—and how I loved it. I like the sea very well, but I *love* farming. It was my born vocation."

"I wish you'd not talk at random!" cried Herbert, fretfully. "Born vocation! You might just as well say you were born to be a mountebank! And where would you get the money to stock a farm of two or three hundred acres? You have put none by, I expect. You never could keep your pence in your pocket when a lad: they were thrown away right and left."

"That's true," laughed Jack. "Other lads used to borrow them. True also that I have not put money by, Herbert. I have not been able to."

"Of course you have not! It wouldn't be you if you had."

"No, Dash, there's not a bit more; you've had it all," cried Jack to the dog. But he, ever generous-natured, did not tell his brother *why* he had not been able to put by: that the calls made upon him by his wife's mother—Aunt Dean, as they still styled her—were so heavy and so perpetual. She wanted a great deal for herself, and she presented vast claims for the expenses of Jack's two little children, and for the maintenance of her daughter when Alice stayed on shore. Alice whispered to Jack she believed her mother was making a private purse for herself. Good-natured Jack thought

it very likely, but he did not stop the supplies. Just as Aunt Dean had been a perpetual drain upon her brother, Jacob Lewis, during his lifetime, so she now drained Jack.

"Then, with no means at command, what utter folly it is for you to think of leaving the sea!" resumed the parson.

"So it is, Herbert," acquiesced Jack. "I assure you I don't think of it."

"Alice does."

"Ay, poor girl, because she wishes it."

"Do you see any *chance* of leaving it?"

"Not a bit," readily acknowledged Jack.

"Then where's the use of talking about it—of harping upon it?"

"None in the world," said Jack.

"Then we'll drop the subject, if you please," pursued Herbert, forgetting, perhaps, that it was he who introduced it.

"Jump then, Dash! Jump, good little Dash!"

"What a worry you make with that dog, John! Attend to me. I want to know why you came to London instead of to Liverpool."

"She was laid on for London this time," answered Jack.

"*Laid on!*" ejaculated Herbert, who knew as much about sailor's phrases as he did of Hebrew.

Jack laughed. "The agents in Calcutta chartered the ship for London, freights for that port being higher than for Liverpool. The *Rose of Delhi* is a free ship."

"Oh," responded Herbert. "I thought perhaps she had changed owners."

"No. But our broker in London is brother to the owners in Liverpool. There are three of them in all. James Freeman is the broker; Charles and Richard are the owners. Rich men they must be!"

"When do you think you shall sail again?"

"It depends upon when they can begin to reload and get the fresh cargo in."

"That does not take long, I suppose," remarked Herbert, slightingly.

"She may be loaded in three days if the cargo is ready and waiting. It may be three weeks if the cargo's not—or more than that."

"And Alice does not go with you?"

Jack shook his head: something like a cloud passed over his fresh, frank face. "No, not this time."

We were all glad to see Jack Tanerton again. He had paid Timberdale but one visit, and that a flying one, since he took command of the *Rose of Delhi*. It was the old Jack Tanerton, frank of face, hearty of manner, flying to all the nooks and corners of the parish with outstretched hands to rich and poor, with kind words and generous help for the sick and sorrowful: just the same, only with a few more years gone over his head. I don't say but Herbert

was also glad to see him; only Herbert never displayed much gladness at anything.

One morning Jack and I chanced to be out together; when, in passing through the green and shady lane, that would be fragrant in summer with wild roses and woodbine, and that skirted Maythorn Bank, we saw someone stooping to peer through the sweetbriar hedge, as if he wanted to see what the house was like, and did not care to look at it openly. He sprang up at sound of our footsteps. It was a slight, handsome young man of five or six-and-twenty, rather under the middle height, with a warm colour, bright dark eyes, and dark whiskers. The gold band on his cap showed that he was a sailor, and he seemed to recognise Jack with a start.

"Good morning, sir," he cried, hurriedly.

"Is it you, Mr. Pym?—good morning," returned Jack, in a cool tone. "What are you doing down here?"

"The ship's finished unloading, and is gone into dry dock to be re-coppered, so I've got a holiday," replied the young man: and he walked away with a brisk step, as if not caring to be questioned further.

"Who is he?" I asked, as we went on in the opposite direction.

"My late chief mate: a man named Pym."

"You spoke as if you did not like him, Jack."

"Don't like him at all," said Jack. "My own chief mate left me in Calcutta, to better himself, as the saying runs; he got command of one of our ships whose master had died out there; Pym presented himself to me, and I engaged him. He gave me some trouble on the homeward voyage; drank, was insolent, and would shirk his duty when he could. Once I had to threaten to put him in irons. I shall never allow him to sail with me again—and he knows it."

"What is he here for?"

"Don't know at all," returned Jack. "He can't have come after me, I suppose."

"Has he left the ship?"

"I can't tell. I told the brokers in London I should wish to have another first officer appointed in Pym's place. When they asked why, I only said he and I did not hit it off together very well. I don't care to report ill of the young man; it might damage his prospects; and he may do better with another master than he did with me."

At that moment Pym overtook us, and accosted Jack: saying something about some bales of "jute," which, as I gathered, had constituted part of the cargo.

"Have you got your discharge from the ship, Mr. Pym?" asked Jack, after answering his question about the bales of jute.

"No, sir."

"No!"

"Not yet. I have not applied for it. There's some talk, I fancy, of making Ferrar chief," added Pym. "Until then I keep my post."

The words were not insolent, but the tone had a ring in it that betokened no civility. I thought Pym would have liked to defy Jack had he dared. Jack's voice, as he answered, was a little haughty—and I had never heard that from Jack in all my life.

"I shall not take Ferrar as chief. What are you talking of, Mr. Pym? Ferrar is not qualified."

"Ferrar is qualifying himself now; he is about to pass," retorted Pym. "Good afternoon, sir."

Had Pym looked back as he turned off, he would have seen Sir Dace Fontaine, who came, in his slow, lumbering manner, round the corner. Jack, who had been introduced to him, stopped to speak. But not a word could Sir Dace answer, for staring at the retreating figure of Pym.

"Does my sight deceive me?" he exclaimed. "Who *is* that man?"

"His name is Pym," said Jack. "He has been my first mate on board the *Rose of Delhi*."

Sir Dace Fontaine looked blacker than thunder. "What is he doing down here?"

"I was wondering what," said Jack. "At first I thought he might have come down after me on some errand or other."

Sir Dace said no more. Remarking that we should meet again in the evening, he went his way, and we went ours.

For that evening the Squire gave a dinner, to which the Fontaines were coming, and old Paul the lawyer, and the Letsoms, and the Ashtons from Timberdale Court. Charles Ashton, the parson, was staying with them: he would come in handy for the grace in place of Herbert Tanerton, who had a real sore throat this time, and must stay at home.

But now it should be explained that, up to this time, none of us had the smallest notion that there was anything between Pym and Verena Fontaine, or that Pym was related to Sir Dace. Had Jack known either the one fact or the other, he might not have said what he did at the Squire's dinner-table. Not that he said much.

It occurred during a lull. Sir Dace craned his long and ponderous neck over the table towards Jack.

"Captain Tanerton, were you satisfied with that chief mate of yours, Edward Pym? Did he do his duty as a chief mate ought?"

"Not always, Sir Dace," was Jack's ready answer. "I was not particularly well satisfied with him."

"Will he sail with you again when you go out?"

"No. Not if the decision lies with me."

Sir Dace frowned and drew his neck in again. I fancied he would have been glad to hear that Pym was going out again with Jack—perhaps to be rid of him.

Colonel Letsom spoke up then. "Why do you not like him, Jack?"

"Well, for one thing, I found him deceitful," spoke out Jack, after hesitating a little, and still without any idea that Pym was known to anybody present.

Verena bent forward to speak then from the end of the table, her face all blushes, her tone resentful.

"Perhaps Mr. Pym might say the same thing of you, Captain Tanerton—that *you* are deceitful?"

"I!" returned Jack, with his frank smile. "No, I don't think he could say that. Whatever other faults I may have, I am straightforward and open: too much so, perhaps, on occasion."

When the ladies left the table, the Squire despatched me with a message to old Thomas about the claret. In the hall, after delivering it, I came upon Verena Fontaine.

"I am going to run home for my music," she said to me, as she put her white shawl on her shoulders. "I forgot to bring it."

"Let me go for you," I said, taking down my hat.

"No, thank you; I must go myself."

"With you, then."

"I wish to go alone," she returned, in a playful tone, but one that had a decisive ring in it. "Stay where you are, if you please, Mr. Johnny Ludlow."

She meant it; I saw that; and I put my hat down and went into the drawing-room. Presently somebody missed her; I said she had gone home to fetch her music.

Upon which they all attacked me for letting her go—for not offering to fetch it for her. Tod and Bob Letsom, who had just come into the room, told me I was not more gallant than a rising bear. I laughed, and did not say what had passed. Mary Ann Letsom plunged into one of her interminable sonatas, and the time slipped on.

"Johnny," whispered the mater to me, "you must go after Verena Fontaine to see what has become of her. You ought not to have allowed her to go out alone."

Truth to say, I was myself beginning to wonder whether she meant to come back at all. Catching up my hat again, I ran off to Maythorn Bank.

Oh! Pacing slowly the shadiest part of the garden there, was Miss Verena, the white shawl muffled round her. Mr. Pym was pacing with her, his face bent down to a level with hers, his arm passed gingerly round her waist.

"I thought they might be sending after me," she cried out, quitting Pym as I went in at the gate. "I will go back with you, Mr. Johnny. Edward, I can't stay another moment," she called back to him; "you see how it is. Yes, I'll be walking in the ravine tomorrow."

Away she went, with so fleet a step that I had much ado to keep

up with her. *That* was my first enlightenment of the secret treason which was destined to bring forth so terrible an ending.

"You won't tell tales of me, Johnny Ludlow?" she stopped to say, in a beseeching tone, as we reached the gate of Crabb Cot. "See, I have my music now."

"All right, Miss Verena. You may trust me."

"I am sure of that. I read it in your face."

Which might be all very well; but I thought it would be more to the purpose could she have read it in Pym's. Pym's was a handsome face, but not one to be trusted.

She glided into the room behind Thomas and his big tea-tray, seized upon a cup at once, and stood with it as coolly as though she had never been away. Sir Dace, talking near the window with old Paul, looked across at her, but said nothing. I wondered how long they had been in the drawing-room, and whether he had noticed her absence.

It was, I think, the next afternoon but one that I went to Maythorn Bank, and found Jack Tanerton there. The Squire had offered to drive Sir Dace to Worcester, leaving him to fix the day. Sir Dace wrote a note to fix the following day, if that would suit; and the Squire sent me to say it would.

Coralie was in the little drawing-room with Sir Dace, but not Verena. Jack seemed to be quite at home with them; they were talking with animation about some of the ports over the seas, which all three of them knew so well. When I left, Jack came with me, and Sir Dace walked with us to the gate. And there we came upon Mr. Pym and Miss Verena promenading together in the lane as comfortably as you please. You should have seen Sir Dace Fontaine's face. A dark face at all times; frightfully dark then.

Taking Verena by the shoulder, never speaking a word, he marched her in at the gate, and pushed her up the path towards the house. Then he turned round to Pym.

"Mr. Edward Pym," said he, "as I once had occasion to warn you off my premises in the Colonies, I now warn you off these. This is my house, and I forbid you to approach it. I forbid you to attempt to hold intercourse of any kind with my daughters. Do you understand me, sir?"

"Quite so, Uncle Dace," replied the young man: and there was the same covert defiance in his tone that he had used the other day to his captain.

"I should like to know what brings you in this neighbourhood?" continued Sir Dace. "You cannot have any legitimate business here. I recommend you to leave it."

"I will think of it," said Pym, as he lifted his cap to us generally, and went his way.

"What does it mean, Johnny?" spoke Tanerton, breathlessly, when we were alone. "Is Pym making-up to that sweet girl?

'I fancy so. Wanting to make up, at least."

"Heaven help her, then! It's like his impudence."

"They are first cousins, you see."

"So much the worse. I expect, though, Pym will find his match in Sir Dace. I don't like him, by the way, Johnny."

"Whom? Pym?"

"Sir Dace. I don't like his countenance: there's too much secretiveness in it for me. And in himself too, unless I am mistaken."

"I am sure there is in Pym."

"I hate Pym!" flashed Jack. And at the moment he looked as if he did.

But would he have acknowledged as much, even to me, had he foreseen the cruel fate that was, all too soon, to place Edward Pym beyond the pale of this world's hate?——and the dark trouble it would bring home to himself, John Tanerton?

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

Away in the east a silver awning,
And stars grown pale in the gathering light:
The New Year comes with the day that's dawning;
The Old Year dies with the dying night.

"A Happy New Year," say the children's voices.
We smile, and, it may be, smother a sigh.
"A Happy New Year"—all the earth rejoices,
And wherefore, good brother, not you and I?

"Ah!" you answer, "the young remember
Nought but the sunshine and flowers of May;
For us the year has a grim November,
And many a dark and sorrowful day."

What then? if our eyes are ever turning
To seek the spot where the shadows hide;
Better the children's faith be learning,
And look, like them, on the sunny side.

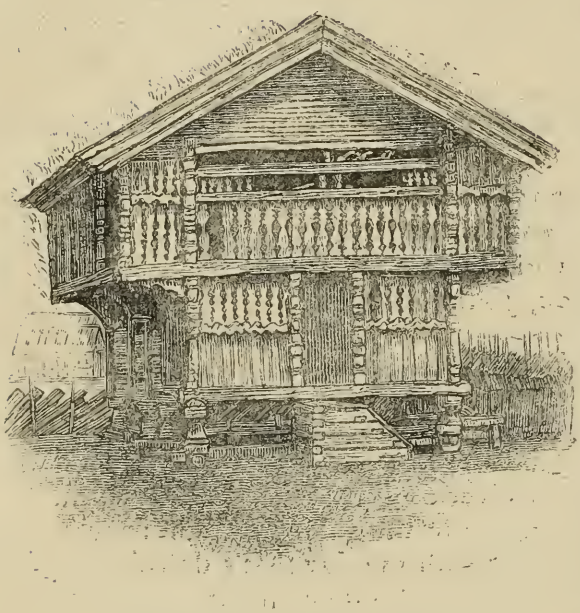
Only now to our wider vision
Mirth and woe are a tangled skein:
We dream no more of a joy elysian,
Save in the Heaven we hope to gain.

Yet, thank God, the old earth rejoices,
Hope can whisper, sweet memories cheer;
And, at the sound of our loved ones' voices,
We too echo—"A Happy New Year!"

SYDNEY GREY.

ABOUT NORWAY.

By Charles W. Wood.



Old Storehouse in Norway.

NOT a land flowing with milk and honey: not a land of olive-yards and vineyards; of southern skies and effeminate luxuriance; of Spanish dances, and Italian serenades; of soft intrigues and quick revenges that wait upon life itself. Not a land of fragrant breezes, where the nightingale sings to its mate, whilst the moon with her train of satellites in stately dignity rises in the dark blue dome, bathing the earth in a silvery flood, the while lovers pace romantic ruins washed by a broad flowing Rhine, or a sterner Danube; or linger in the bowers on the banks of the soft blue waters of a Moselle: lovers whose lips are silent for a bliss that is filling their hearts with an emotion, for which an eternity would be too short, and life, alas, often proves but too long. Not this. But a land of eternal snows, whose mountain tops are fraught with the mystery of a silence that is never broken, where the foot of man never falls: of gigantic icebergs, of rushing streams, of grand waterfalls and mighty cataracts that seem to increase and multiply as you progress through the country. A land which owes everything to nature and nothing to man: where ruins are not, and the nightingale's song is unheard, and bowers of roses may be read about, but scarcely seen. A land scantily peopled, but peopled by men and women honest and fearless, simple and genuine, frank and hospitable—until a day will come when mixture with the world which seeks them more and more year by year, may give them the faults of that world, and take from them their best heritage—a single eye, a simple faith, an uprightness of purpose rare as beautiful after six thousand years of levelling. A land where railroads are scarce, and travelling is long and laborious, but very pleasant. A land not pam-

pered by the refined luxury of the age, the squandering of wealth in pomp and vanity, purple and fine linen: but a land of stern realities, where wealth is rare, and each man's inheritance is labour and toil. A land with bright, bracing air; a coast, iron-bound and full of wonders. A land that reminds us in a measure of that CITY that hath no foundations, where there is "no night;" for here, during some portion of the year, the sun never sets, and darkness falls not.

For such a land, one fine day—it was the 20th of June and a Friday—the good ship *Cameo* left the docks of Millwall. That very morning had first brought the sad news of the death of the Prince Imperial: news that cast a gloom over the journey and haunted one long afterwards; rising up unbidden like a hideous phantom, alike in the active daylight hours, or the quiet, wakeful moments of the night. This ghostly shadow of a terrible visitation haunted our voyage, but there was nothing else to cast a gloom upon the voyage itself. The day was bright and sunny, in a month and a year whose bright and sunny days had been like the recorded visits of angels—few and far between. Ay, recorded: for who knows how often angels visit each one of us, unsuspected even by ourselves, but bearing fruit for a future harvest?

We passed through the dock gates with solemn difficulty: as usual, barges and other small craft seemed to have come up there for the undivided purpose of retarding our progress. But we were out in the broad, open river at last, and steaming downwards to the music of hammer and anvil from the factories on the shore: music that may be heard a hundred times with a hundred fresh emotions: gaining all its enchantment from distance, and a certain sentimental feeling of affection for all things English and homelike that creeps into the heart of the outward-bound.

It is all mournful and melancholy enough in itself, prosaic and matter of fact; yet it all possesses a subtle exhilarating charm. It is the sense of surrounding life and motion that makes itself felt and realized: whilst we ourselves, in our rapid progress, seem to impregnate the very air with motion also: and the mind is doubly excited from the fact of being bound for that ever seductive goal, the shores of the Unknown. I had reached the steamer plunged in deepest melancholy, and for once almost realized the feelings of a certain friend who shall be nameless lest these pages meet his eye: one who is in the habit of forming plans for a holiday, puts his house in order, takes his ticket, enters the carriage, and just as the train is on the move, gets out and hies himself home again. Yet in all other conditions of life he is a sane man, whom to know is to esteem.

On this occasion so confirmed was the melancholy, that but for A—'s presence, who declared that nothing should tempt him to go back, I should never that day have made one of the passengers of the *Cameo*. But with the sense of progress, the shifting scene, the

homeward-bound vessels passing us, so brimful of happiness that it spread itself abroad and became infectious, all melancholy disappeared, and by the time we were well out at sea, had ceased to exist.

There are two popular ways of reaching Norway from England; the route by way of Hull, and that by way of London. Both routes are in the hand of the same company. From Hull the steamers start once a week, for Trondhjem and Bergen alternately: whilst a fortnightly steamer in addition starts for Christiania. From London the steamer starts only once a fortnight, for Christiania, calling at Christianssand on its way. The passage by way of Hull is, it need not be said, shorter than that by way of London. But to any one bound for Christianssand or Christiania, and starting from London or its neighbourhood, the latter route may safely be recommended.

The *Cameo* was due at Christianssand on Sunday morning: at Christiania on Monday, about 7 a.m. The angry moods of the North Sea are a matter of history, and, like history, repeat themselves. But on this occasion the sea was calm and motionless as a river. The *Cameo* is an especially good sea boat: and nothing could exceed the politeness and attention of Captain Langlands, who did all in his power to promote the comfort of his passengers.

The company, I hear, have one rule that is open to grave objections. "I tell it as 'twas told to me." I was assured of the correctness of the information, but have not positively ascertained it by enquiry. It is said that they leave the commanders of the ships to cater for the passengers, and to make what profit they can out of the transaction. The least consideration will shew the mistake of this arrangement. If complaints are necessary, few would like, from delicate motives, to appeal to the captain, with whom would lie the fault. They might, indeed, fare after the manner of a certain friend (*not* the one lately quoted), who, staying at Gastein for the waters, objected to an extortionate bill at Straubinger's hotel, and on requesting to be taken before the magistrate, was ushered into the presence of Straubinger himself, who was landlord, magistrate, mayor, and all the civic bodies of the place rolled into one grand, magnificent whole; made out his own bills, charged his own prices, held his own courts, heard his clients' appeals, and delivered sentences in his own favour. We have heard of a mock parliament, some ages ago: perhaps this is not the only mock court of the 19th century. To be quite fair, my friend tells me this happened ten years ago. It may be, that in the meantime, old Straubinger has shuffled off this mortal coil, and delivered his staff of office to another generation. Or, if still ruling the roost at Gastein, his conscience may have awakened to the error of his ways—his overcharges, and his abominable dinners, which resulted in impaired digestions—and he may be atoning for past shortcomings by over diligence and liberality in the present. If so, who shall say that the age of miracles is past?

On board the *Cameo*—to return to our theme—there was little to complain of in the bill of fare: it was all that could be desired, at any rate in the matter of quantity; but, as the company already charge somewhat highly for the passage to Norway, it is their duty to provide *themselves* for the comfort of the passengers during the voyage. On the return journey from Christiania to Hull, by the *Angelo*, we dined at one, as usual, and from that hour until half-past eight at night, when we landed, nothing whatever was provided by way of refreshment. Much quiet grumbling was justly the consequence, but not the only consequence. A large number of passengers entered the station hotel in a condition that must sorely have taxed the resources of the larder of that comfortable inn, and the managers thereof might fairly have claimed from the company a double fee which they were considerate enough not to charge their guests.

I had left London with only one settled idea in connection with Norway—a voyage to the North Cape. Having been considerably out of health for some time, this voyage was proposed as a means of restoration. It was at once bracing and interesting, combining all the advantages of a sea voyage without its monotony; for, from the time you leave Christiania or Bergen, to the end of the journey, you never lose sight of land. Our first intentions had been to land at Christianssand, and await there the steamer for the North Cape. But before arriving at that port, we changed our plans, decided to go on to Christiania, and thence overland to Bergen, there taking ship for the longer sea voyage.

Friday passed and Saturday, after leaving London, and still the sea was calm, and still we looked in vain for the rough waves of the Northern Ocean. Sunday morning rose fresh and fair. We gradually approached land, and about eleven o'clock found ourselves at anchor in the harbour of Christianssand.

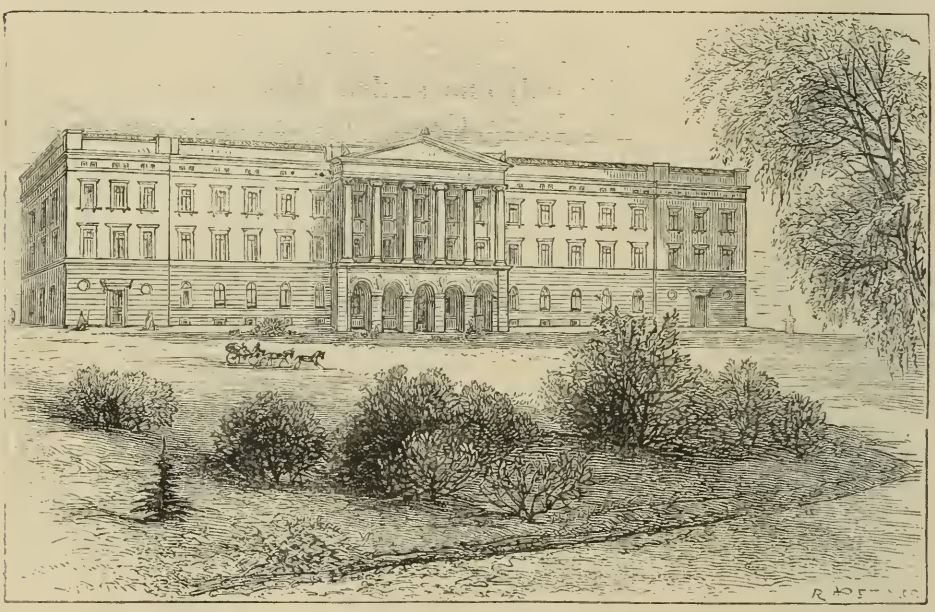
The town lay in front of us: on either side land stretched out low and green. To our left an English yacht was anchored, and the harbour contained a good many vessels and steamers, including a man-of-war. The water presented a lively appearance; flags were flying everywhere in honour of Sunday; and over all was spread that quietness and repose, that seems to mark the day of rest at sea still more emphatically than on land.

From our point of view the town looked primitive and orderly. We were to stay here some hours to land cargo; small boats came about us, and soon after, on this Sunday morning, we set foot for the first time on Norwegian soil. It was our first impression of Norway, our first experience of land, people, and customs, and curiosity was excited.

Church was over when we landed: and in Norway, when church is over, Sunday is over for all religious purposes. The remainder of the day is devoted not to work, but to rest or recreation. If any

one is on a journey it is quite proper to travel on a Sunday. The people do not take off their best clothes or their national costumes, for the most part worn only on that day, but they meet at each other's houses, or take walks, or amuse themselves in a quiet inoffensive manner, until the hour comes for separating. On the highways and byways, you will meet lovers with arms intertwined and whispering sweet follies, just as in other countries; for though so far north, and the land of snow and loud and long wintry blasts, yet all this fails to render them unsusceptible to the mesmerism of bright eyes, and each in turn falls victim to the influence of the tender passion.

Only—their courtships are often slow and lengthened. It is not unusual, so it is said, for a youth to be wooing his bride elect for



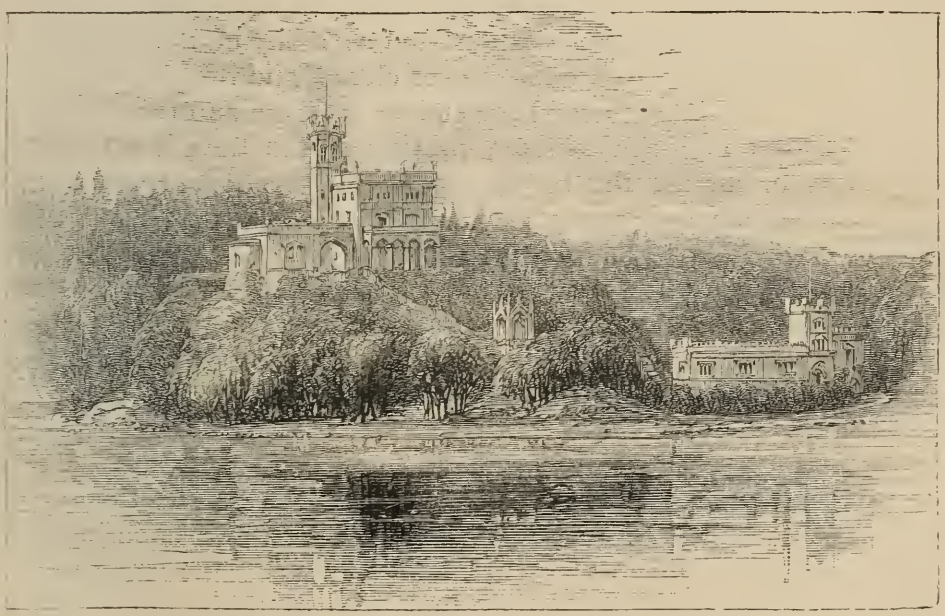
Winter Palace of the King, Christiania.

ten or a dozen years; so that when the marriage finally takes place, great and prolonged are the rejoicings. This is not marrying in haste to repent at leisure: and though, no doubt, there are bad natures and evil tempers which render many a home less happy than it might be, I fancy that divorce courts are as unknown as they are unneeded. For the most part married life is happy and united, and the crimes and cruelties that mar many a home in more privileged lands, would fill the souls of these fair Northerners with astonishment.

I doubt if a better first glimpse can be gained of a Norwegian town than that of Christianssand. It is so primitive, so characteristic, so typical of the country, that, in a moment, England and all things English fall from you as a mantle that is loosened, and you feel yourself at once on a foreign shore, clothed in foreign garb. Across the North Sea, England has followed you: English people

have been around you : the English tongue has made itself heard in sounds more or less harsh according to the speaker. But, set foot in Christianssand, and at once, as it were with a magician's wand, scenes, impressions, thoughts—all change.

So it was this morning. No English town exists bearing the slightest resemblance to Christianssand. The day was hot and bright ; the sun came out or went in, as thick white clouds drove across a sky of intensest, purest blue. This sky alone, was enough to raise the most drooping spirits, if such there had been, to a point of exhilaration. The streets were wide, white, and clean, running at right angles with each other. The houses were all, or nearly all, built of wood ; only a new building, such as a bank, here and there



SUMMER RESIDENCE OF THE KING, CHRISTIANIA.

standing out in the dignity of stone, fronted by oxydized railings looking like burnished silver ; grand, but not half so interesting and picturesque to an Englishman as the less pretentious structures.

And as the houses are nearly all of wood, it necessitates constant painting. Most of them here were white, yellow, or blue gray, now and then a glaring red standing out as a tribute to the gaudy taste of its owner. The houses, for the most part, were of two stories, all more or less built after the same style, varying more in size than fashion. This produced a sameness of aspect that would probably soon become tedious : unless habit grew into second nature, as, alas, it often does in things of more moment than the form of a house, or the appearance of a street. Nevertheless, the general effect of Christianssand, as it stood out that Sunday morning in the hot sunshine, was one of extreme brightness and lightness. Fresh, clean,

and airy, it seemed rather a model or toy town, than a town destined for the occupation, the daily lives of men, women and children.

Cleanliness was a most prominent feature. Many of the houses, no doubt, are as old as the town itself, yet nearly all, in their fresh paint, looked but of yesterday. The windows were large, and elaborately set out. Fine curtains were displayed above and below, so that no one room seemed to have more honour bestowed upon it than another. From many of them beautiful plants grew and flourished, and expanded in these natural hot-houses : exquisite roses, and drooping fuchsias, and abundant geraniums arresting the eye and raising one's envy—for elsewhere, in the open air, flowers were not to be seen, much less bought. In some of the streets trees grew down on either side, casting their shadows athwart the hot white roadway, and relieving the painful glare.

Most of these streets were as deserted as a city of the dead. A cannon might have been fired with eyes closed, and done no harm to living soul. Quietness reigned pre-eminent. Here and there a head stretched from an open window, peering at the travellers through the blinds or amidst the roses, was all that could be seen of the 13,000 inhabitants. It was brightened by the sunshine, but on a wet day it would be difficult to conceive anything more melancholy than the streets of this quiet town. Over and over again, as we threaded its thoroughfares, we congratulated ourselves on a change of plans; thereby escaping the terrible dulness that must otherwise have been ours for a few days whilst awaiting the arrival of the North Cape steamer, on her way from Christiania.

We now saw, too, that to embark from Christianssand for the North Cape is a mistake. Setting aside other considerations, you have not the option of visiting several steamers, and choosing the one you prefer, as may usually be done in either of the larger ports. Christianssand is the fourth town in Norway, but the more important steamers merely call here on their way to and from other ports and countries. Its harbour, an excellent one and very picturesque, is of greater use to smaller vessels. A thriving trade, amongst other things, is done in lobsters, which are regularly sent over to England in large quantities. But they gain considerably in price in the English market. In Norway, a first-rate lobster may be bought for four-pence.

Presently we came upon the Park : a small plantation something in the shape of a triangle, with a few avenues of trees, and beds enlivened by laburnums and rhododendrons : a place that gains much of its dignity from its name—a not uncommon type of animated life, where occasionally an institution or a person flourishes like a green bay-tree, because the world, following suit like a flock of sheep, insensibly accords it a name that throws a glamour over the din of its sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. Here we came upon good deal of sounding brass in the shape of a military band, discoursing sweet sounds to a large gathering of people.

It was our first experience of a Norwegian crowd, and certainly a by no means unpleasant one. They were quiet and orderly to a degree almost amounting to "dull apathy," as is usual with the Norwegians. They have nothing of the pushing and scrambling, the rough boisterous mirth, so frequently the type of an English multitude. It would be impossible to imagine a Norwegian mob assembling in one of their own parks, ranting insane nonsense, and destroying everything around them. They know better, and have more sense. A large proportion of the people are inclined to republican ideas; but they let well alone, and are content to honour the powers that be. The keynote to the whole tenor of their lives was struck by a remark made by an intelligent Norwegian, who seemed to possess some standing in his country, as we were steaming one day along the Sognefjord. "It may be," he said, "that we all have our opinions upon many subjects, but we are most of us agreed upon this point—that since we have a king we must treat him as a king."

The crowd in the park that Sunday morning listened to the music, and evidently enjoyed it. They were all dressed in their best; and here we first learned the lesson, confirmed by after experience, that, once divested of their national costumes, the Norwegians, for the most part, resemble the English in their dress—possessing the same bad taste, the same inability to wear and put on their garments. This remark applies, of course, to the humbler classes, such as would be found in England on a Sunday morning, listening to a band of music. The girls, many of them servants of the town, were tawdry and draggletailed; their head-gear, perched like beacons upon a rock, decorated with feathers and flowers, and ribbons in extravagant profusion, the most gorgeous colours and most startling combinations.

The costumes of the country visible to-day were few and disappointing. The most remarkable were a group of men and women belonging to a mountainous district. The men walked about in huge trowsers, which came up to their arm-pits, and buttoned round their chests. The women, to restore the balance of things, wore short petticoats, which amply displayed their heavy, ill-shaped limbs. Both men and women were awkward and ungainly in their movements, and from the low caste of their features, their hideous costumes, and stunted expression, they looked the very quintessence of an aboriginal tribe—a striking exception to the ordinary type of Norwegian peasant.

The band played its selection in front of the garrison, and soldiers in dark uniforms—some with plumes in their hats, paraded about, as much to the admiration of the fair—and frail—sex, as if the scene had been Hyde Park instead of a quiet corner in Norway. Meanwhile two of us found an entrance into the church, and went up into the gallery. It is called a cathedral, and Christianssand is the

A Norwegian Wedding Party.

residence of a bishop; but neither inside nor out could the edifice boast of any pretensions to architectural beauty. The whitewashed walls, and the yellow-painted pews, were of the stiffest order; and over the altar, a badly executed relief that might have done duty in some Roman Catholic building, was somewhat in contradiction to the "severe" plainness of the rest of the church. The religion of Norway is Lutheran, and, perhaps, no country has less sympathy with Romanism, and in no country is Romanism making less progress. Its forms and ceremonials, appealing to the senses rather than to the spiritual part of man's nature, has no attractions for this honest, simple-minded people.

Quitting the church, and the park, we went through the deserted streets to the river. Here ruin met the eye. A short time before, the rains had swollen the rapids and torrents; the waters poured forth their tributes, and the river became so swift in its course, that an immense number of logs, tearing through the water, dashed with such force against the bridge as to sweep it away. The river is wide here, and people were crossing by means of a ferry until the mischief could be repaired.

To-day the river had very much subsided, but the water was eddying and swirling round the stone pedestals, whilst pine logs drifted down in twos and threes and yet larger numbers. On the opposite shore were groups of houses and a garrison: quite a small town. We did not cross. Time was drawing on apace: it was scarcely prudent to put more land and water between us and the *Cameo*.

About four o'clock in the afternoon, the steamer started again, on her way to Christiania. Christianssand, her forts, houses, and harbour, looked green, picturesque and lively, as we receded from the shores—more lively at a distance than in reality. But all was soon lost to sight, as we turned the corner and plunged into full speed. Rain now began to fall, and the brightness of the day was over.

The next morning a very few of the passengers found their way on deck at four o'clock. We were now in the Christiania Fjord, whose beauties every moment disclosed themselves. On either side, the banks were clothed with green. Forests of pine grew in dark abundance; villages nestled in the slopes; here and there a small vessel stood in the stocks in a distant dockyard. Now the hills opened up, range beyond range, barren, or dark with pine trees, according to their nature. Many small islands were dotted about the water. At one point the Fjord narrowed, bringing the land very near to the steamer: then suddenly opened out again, broad and calm as an inland lake.

At length, we came in sight of Christiania. Passing many houses beautifully situated, Oscarshall, the summer residence of the King, stood out, white and charming amidst a wealth of verdure, like a white jewel in a dark setting. This morning it looked hot and

dazzling in the brilliant sunshine. Onward yet, a short distance, and about seven o'clock, before us rose the mass of houses, the church towers and steeples of Christiania: and we came to an anchor.

The Scandinavia Hotel had been recommended, but we afterwards found that the Victoria is the largest, is considered the best, and is most frequented by the English. The Scandinavia, however, proved very comfortable, and its chef-de-cuisine quite a cordon bleu. For my own part, I think it an advantage in many ways to stay at an hotel less frequented by the English than by the people of its own country.

A first glimpse at Christiania showed it to be far less typical of a Norwegian town than Christianssand. The streets were wide, the houses most of them built of stone. The whole place looked flourishing, as befits a capital; and, for Norway, fashionable. At the end of one long, broad thoroughfare, on an eminence, stands the winter palace. It would have been almost possible to fancy oneself in a small Paris or Brussels, but for the names over the shop doors, and the strange language that made itself heard in all directions.

As soon as the steamer came alongside, she was boarded by a number of porters touting for work. The small details of most countries repeat themselves. One of the men seized upon our chattels, and in a few moments had stowed them away upon a truck. The quay, even at this hour, was crowded with people, and many of the shops were already open. The Norwegians make the most of summer and long days, and are then as early as in the dark winter months they are the contrary. We were soon marching beside our luggage, all restraint thrown to the winds, feeling free as birds of the air, all ceremony abandoned, a delightful sensation of liberty, combined with a longing for adventure reigning instead.

We soon reached the hotel, which is centrally situated, and before long were enjoying our first Norwegian breakfast. After the simple fare on board, our table now seemed luxuriously furnished, and in the long, lofty dining room we felt once more able to breathe. Here, for the first time, we came upon boiled cream, a universal custom of the country. The cream is served cold, but has been previously boiled, perhaps to preserve it; a process that spoils it or all tea and coffee purposes. But we were not in a humour to find fault with anything: we took our boiled cream thankfully: and presently asked for more.

There is little in Christiania as distinctly Norwegian as in Christianssand. The wide, fashionable-looking streets, with their air of prosperity, are well paved and wonderfully clean. The large handsome houses are chiefly built of stone: for it is now against the law to build them of wood within the town. Here, as in Christianssand, the windows are very large, so that you might as well live in a lantern as in some of the rooms. The shops, too, are large, and, as far as could be judged, quite as good as any other town in

Europe. Cats and dogs are at a premium, the latter especially, and it is against the law to take a sporting dog into the country: a law hard to be understood.

Shopkeepers expect you to take off your hat upon entering their place of business, and think it quite as great a favour to serve as to be patronized. Their manners are generally polite and civil; but a neglect to uncover the head, which may easily occur when pre-occupied by thought, will often lead to an abruptness and downright incivility that speedily brings you to a sense of your omission. The French have been considered the politest nation on the face of the globe, but the Norwegians are in advance of them in this respect. Half their time is taken up in bowing, which is carried to a most inconvenient excess. If you meet them twenty times in five minutes, twenty times you must acknowledge their salute, or be put down as a barbarian. As you treat them, so will they treat you. Politeness meets with its return; but I doubt their understanding that persistent politeness will in time conquer the roughest exterior.

Norway is a country without aristocracy. The only nobility, if there be any, are the humble peasants who live at many of the "stations" in the country: small farms that have descended in a direct line from father to son since the days when William the Conqueror was as yet unknown in England. These are the "inheritors of the land." They are most of them poor, but proud, and their bearing has a certain dignity and freedom that causes some wonder until its source is known. The people are very much on an equality with each other; riches and education, more than the accident of birth, separating class from class. Such terms of respect as "sir" or "madam," known in England, do not exist in Norway, and the traveller must not take their absence amiss. They will not be used, except occasionally by those who have come into contact with the English and learned their customs; and even then only when English is spoken.

The Norwegians have, many of them, a habit of frowning and looking forbiddingly at a stranger. As it does not appear amongst themselves, it must be supposed to have been acquired in response to a manner that unhappily is not uncommon amongst a certain type of the English, when addressing persons they look upon as below them in the social scale. Gentleness and courtesy of manner, the "noblesse oblige" is not universally found in England. And again, many whose hearts overflow with kindness and goodwill, from a certain mauvaise honte, a wide-spread British characteristic, assume an abruptness of speech and action that leaves behind it an impression they would lament to produce.

The Norwegians, innately, seem to possess nothing of all this. There is something very noble in their disposition, especially where it has been unspoiled by too much dealing with the outer world. For it is to be feared, that as iron sharpeneth iron, so this

people, coming into contact with the sharpness and cunning of other nations, will lose much of their native simplicity and integrity. Ten years hence, travelling in Norway will be as different from what it now is, as it is now unlike what it was ten years ago.

In that first early morning, we went to the fish market in Christiania, an interesting and uncommon sight to English eyes and ears. The fish men and women were all seated in their boats alongside the stone pavements, shut in from the outer water by great locks. Servants and house-wives, with great tin baskets hanging on their arms, were bargaining for the day's dinner. Codfish, mackerel, eels, and lobsters were in abundance. Anchovies—or a small fish so-called—might be counted almost by the million. The fish women with

STREET IN CHRISTIANIA.

their loud voices were contending with their customers—as they have from time immemorial, and will to the end—about price. Now, one made believe to go away, when a desperate shriek would summon her back, and fish and money would exchange hands, buyer and seller each looking thoroughly victimized. The sun was pouring his hot rays upon the sparkling water, in which the boats were bobbing up and down. At the stern of each boat a great bough was raised, as large as half a tree, and under the shade cast by the leaves sat the fish women. The greatest coquette could not have conceived a more striking effect, as the leaves glinted in the sunshine, and cast their quivering reflections over the women and their surroundings. Nothing could look more picturesque in its way. The scene was lively and enlivening: the water was full of animation: a babel of voices went on around, chattering and bargaining, interspersed with much laughter. Much of the fish was out of sight, swimming in the

holds of the small boats, whence they were fished out with nets as required.

These early mornings in the fish market are one of the distinctive sights of Norway; where people and customs join hands for the benefit of the traveller. As a rule our impressions have to be taken from the country alone. It is thinly populated, and you may journey many a mile and many a day, and thought, pleasures, and experiences must for the most part come from the grand hills and valleys, snow-capped or ice-bound or torrent-swept; the wonderful pine forests, the blue skies, the rarified air; great solitudes, wonderfully

Old House in Norway.

refreshing after the crowding and bustle of a great town. There for a time you escape from the world, and the mind recovers its tone, and gathers fresh force for the battle of life: for the struggle upwards and onwards amidst the downward influences that surround it on all sides.

A NIGHT IN A BALLOON.

By Mary E. Penn.

IT was Whit Monday; a bright June day, some fifteen years ago. Evening was closing in, and the crowds of Whitsun holiday folks from the great midland manufacturing town of Hammerton—hard-worked mechanics and factory "hands" for the most part—were returning by road or rail from their excursions in the environs.

The people's park at Laston Hall was still thronged, however, for the annual fête was to conclude as usual, with a grand display of fireworks. All day the chief attraction had been the captive balloon in the lower grounds, but now that dusk was falling, the crowd had deserted the remoter parts of the gardens, and gathered about the terrace where the fireworks were to be displayed.

There were still a few loiterers left in the pleasant, dusky paths, and among them was a couple whom more than one person turned to look after, struck by something of country freshness in their dress and appearance which was an agreeable contrast to the pallid faces, and tawdry finery of the Hammerton folks. They were George and Ellen Fielding. He, was a tall, well-made, bronzed-complexioned man of thirty, with the air of a prosperous farmer or small land-owner; she, a fair-haired, sweet-looking, refined girl of eighteen, whose likeness to her companion showed her to be his sister. They, too, seemed to be making their way towards the terrace, but they walked slowly, and were talking gravely and earnestly.

"It is no use, Nellie," he was saying, in answer to some remonstrance from his companion; "I must speak as I feel; and how can I help feeling bitterly towards the man who is doing his best to defraud me of my rights? And I *had* a right to the property John Lester left me. It was not a gift, but a compensation for my——"

"I know," the girl interrupted gently, "but that ought to have been stated in the will."

"And because it was not, I must be robbed. Because of John Lester's neglect, I must be accused of fraud by his son! I, who would scorn——"

"But he does not know you," she interposed again; "these suspicions have been suggested to him. If he knew you he could not believe it for a moment."

He went on as if she had not spoken. "The ground I have cultivated—the house I have looked upon as my home, will be wrested from me, and I shall have to begin the world afresh. It is hard—hard!"

"The trial is not over yet," she reminded him. He shook his head despondingly.

"I know how it will end. Young Lester has money, friends, influence, while I——"

His sister sighed; he heard it, and rousing himself from his depression by an effort, exclaimed remorsefully: "There I go again! harping on my grievance when I came here expressly to forget it, and making you as wretched as myself. Come, Ellen, let us see what is going on."

They quickened their pace along the winding path, and presently emerged upon a small lawn, surrounded with palisadings. It was the place reserved for the ascensions of the captive balloon, which was now hovering above their heads, the light, elegant car depending from it, being only a few feet from the ground.

Ellen Fielding uttered a cry of delighted surprise; it was the first time she had seen a balloon so near.

"Two places left," said the custodian as they approached.

George Fielding glanced at the car; one seat was already occupied by a young man of four or five and twenty, with a handsome, sunburnt face, and frank blue eyes.

"Two places," George repeated; "would you like to go up, Nellie?"

She hesitated. "There is no danger, I suppose?"

"Not the least," the custodian assured her. "More than a thousand persons have gone up this summer, and they all came down again safe and sound."

She still hesitated, but though she felt some timidity, the originality of such an adventure was tempting, and after a moment she turned to her brother, and declared herself ready to make the ascent.

"Off we go, then, for a voyage in the air!" he said, as he placed her in the car.

Directly they were seated the custodian let out the rope, and the balloon began gently to ascend.

When she felt it rising Ellen turned slightly pale, and could not suppress an exclamation.

The stranger who sat opposite to her asked, smiling: "Are you afraid?"

His admiring glance brought the colour back to her face at once, as she replied: "A little, but I shall soon get used to it."

"See," said her brother, "we are already above the trees."

She looked down, and soon forgot her timidity in admiration of the scene. Beneath them, like a map in relief, lay the park and gardens, their whole extent visible at a glance. Immediately under the balloon was the terrace, covered by a dense crowd, whose murmur scarcely reached our aërial travellers. The air was pure and light, and of an exhilarating freshness.

The girl turned to her brother with sparkling eyes.

"Oh George, how beautiful!" And in a lower tone she added: "Don't you feel somehow calmer and happier than you did just now?"

"Yes," he said smiling, "I do. I seem to have risen for the time above the troubles and turmoil of earth. But what is going on down there? what a crowd there is on the terrace!"

"They are waiting for the fireworks," the young stranger observed.

"Ah, there is the first rocket," exclaimed Ellen. "How pretty! like golden rain."

There was a pause; the balloon still ascended. No more fireworks appeared.

"There seems to be something wrong," the stranger remarked, leaning over the car. "Look! the framework which supports the 'set pieces' has fallen down."

"Just hark!" exclaimed George Fielding, "do you hear the people shouting? and—why, they are tearing up the palisadings! What does that mean?"

"It means that there is a riot, I'm afraid," the other returned. "They are a rough lot, those Hammerton folks, and I expect they are revenging their disappointment on the gardens."

"How glad I am that we are not in that crowd," was Ellen's remark.

"You have quite lost your fear, now?" the young man asked.

"Oh yes, I should like to go much higher."

"We are almost at the end of our tether, I think," he replied. And even as he spoke, the balloon stopped.

"What a view we have now!" George exclaimed. It was indeed a beautiful panorama that stretched beneath them, of hill and valley, field and stream, in the "leafy heart" of Warwickshire. Twilight was stealing over the scene, idealizing its colours, and giving a dreamy softness to its outlines. The great prosaic town of Hammerton was only dimly discerned through its shroud of smoke.

"Old Fuller was right," the stranger said, enthusiastically. "There is no county to beat Warwickshire. 'It is the Heart but not the Core of England, having nothing coarse or choky therein.' Are you like myself, a Warwickshire man?" he added, turning to George Fielding.

"Oh, yes, born and bred. I have spent here all the best years of my life—before it was spoilt by law-suits and the like," he muttered, half aloud.

"Ay, they do spoil one's life. No one knows that better than I," the other returned quickly.

"Are you, too, compelled to defend your rights in a court of law?" Fielding demanded, looking at him with sudden interest.

"Yes, and against an adversary who will do his best to rob me of them."

"Like mine," responded the young farmer emphatically; "and if he succeeds, I shall lose all."

"Let us hope that he will not," was the stranger's reply; "though I fear it is sometimes the case that law is stronger than justice; particularly when one has an adversary as unscrupulous as I believe mine to be."

"Ah! I can sympathise with you," exclaimed the other. "I see you too are at law with some Frank Lester—some heartless, unprincipled ——"

"Frank Lester!" echoed the stranger; "that is my own name."

"Yours?"

"Yes, and my opponent is George Fielding."

For a moment the two men gazed at each other in silence, with mingled astonishment and hostility. Ellen was terrified.

"George," she whispered, "pray do not ——" But he did not heed her.

"Frank Lester," he cried suddenly, "what you said of me just now was a base slander, and I call upon you to retract it."

"Not till you retract your expressions with regard to myself," the young man retorted, in the same tone. "It is false that I wish to rob you—false that I am ——"

George Fielding half rose from his seat, but Ellen clung to his arm, trembling.

"George—pray, pray control yourself!" she implored; "at least, do not quarrel here."

"You are right, this is not the place for it," he responded, commanding himself by an effort. "Time enough when we get to earth again."

The balloon had now been some time stationary, and they were expecting every instant that it would begin its descent. But as the moments passed, and it still hung motionless, young Lester leaned over the edge of the car, and peered through the gathering shadows beneath.

"Surely the man has not forgotten us," he muttered.

"He is not there!" Miss Fielding exclaimed. "The enclosure is empty."

"The rioters have frightened him from his post," said her brother, "and look! they are making a bonfire of the benches, and a band of them are running through the gardens, putting out the lamps."

"They are under the balloon!" cried Ellen, clasping her hands. "And now—ah, good heavens!"

"What is the matter?"

"They—they are cutting the rope!"

"No—no; impossible!"

"Look!" she gasped.

The young men leaned out of the car, and saw it was but too true They shouted with all their might, waving hats and handkerchiefs, but it was too late. Believing the car to be empty the rioters had

severed the ropes which held the balloon captive, and the latter, rising with prodigious rapidity, soon disappeared in the evening mists.

At first they exhausted themselves in vain lamentations, but after a time a calm produced by prostration succeeded. They all three remained silent, motionless, apathetic.

The terrible peculiarity of the situation was their utter helplessness. They could do nothing, they could hope for no assistance; they drifted at the mercy of blind chance.

Ellen, half fainting, had hidden her face on the shoulder of her brother, who mechanically supported her with his arm, but was too stupefied to offer her any encouragement.

Young Lester, who was seated opposite to them, glanced at the girl compassionately from time to time, but did not speak. There was a barrier of angry pride between the two men which kept them apart, even in their common danger.

Meantime, the balloon, abandoned to the night breeze, drifted on at random, now cleaving the air with the swiftness of a swallow, then hovering majestically, like an eagle above its eyrie. Occasionally, Lester and Fielding looked over the edge of the car into the gulf of shadows beneath them, where they could just discern the vague confused lights which indicated towns and villages. But little by little, as the balloon ascended into the higher regions, these last traces of earth disappeared. The atmosphere became every moment more rarefied; their breathing was oppressed; there was a singing in the ears, and a painful tingling in every limb. Now, too, the air became so intensely cold that it seemed to freeze the blood in their veins, and a chill mist enveloped them on every side, like a ghostly curtain.

Ellen, who had hitherto uttered no complaint, suddenly sank from the seat, on to the floor of the car.

"Nellie, Nellie—what is the matter?" exclaimed her brother, in alarm.

"I am tired—and cold. I want to sleep," she murmured, her eyes closing.

"Good heavens! what shall I do? If she sleeps she will never wake again. Ellen, look up—rouse yourself!"

But she remained motionless. He could not see her face, but her hands were damp and deadly cold.

"Wrap her in this," said Frank Lester's voice, and looking round, Fielding saw that the young man had taken off his coat.

"No, no, you want it yourself," he stammered, surprised and touched; "she can have mine——"

"This is the warmest. Take it—I shall do well enough. I forgot till this moment that I had my pocket-flask with me," he added; "if she can swallow a little brandy——"

He gently raised the girl's head, and supporting it on his knee

poured a few drops between her lips, then chafed her hands, bending his head to listen anxiously to the faint beating of her heart.

"She is reviving," he whispered; "if we can keep her warm she will take no hurt."

As he assisted Fielding to draw the coat more closely round her, the latter's hand touched his. Yielding to a sudden impulse, the young farmer seized and pressed it.

"Lester, you are a good fellow," he said, huskily; "if I had known you before I should not have said—what I did just now. Forgive me.'

"There is nothing to forgive; I was the most in fault," Lester answered quickly, cordially returning the pressure; "we have both been mistaken. Enmity is often the result more of ignorance and misunderstanding than of malice. Hush—your sister is recovering."

"Yes, I am better now," the girl said faintly. "I heard what you have been saying, and I am glad—so glad you are friends. Perhaps," she continued solemnly, "perhaps we may never see earth again, and would it not have been terrible to have gone into the presence of God with hearts full of hatred and enmity?"

The men were silent, the minds of both were occupied with thoughts too deep for words.

They felt calmer now. The reconciliation seemed to have given them fresh courage. Hitherto they had been isolated by hatred, now they were united by the common peril, and the better fit to endure it.

So passed the long hours of the night. As dawn approached, the wind, which had hitherto borne them steadily upwards, gradually subsided, leaving the air calm, and the balloon began gently to descend. Hope returned to their hearts; they waited anxiously for daylight.

At length the "awful rose of dawn" unfolded in the East; long rays of light shot upwards over the sky; the grey clouds broke into bright bars and islets, floating in a golden sea; and then, in all his majesty, up rose the sun.

For them, it was like a resurrection. They were no longer alone in an abyss of darkness; a blank, death-like void. The sun shone; the earth still existed! There, beneath them, were woods and hills, dewy meadows, and pastoral streams.

A fresh, moist odour reached them from the fields; the lark poured out his matin song, high up in the luminous air.

Still the balloon descended; and now they could distinguish houses and figures. Suddenly the farmer uttered an exclamation of joyful surprise.

"Nellie! look! there is Ashwood church, and there—there ——"

His voice faltered, he turned and looked at his sister, silently pointing down. He had recognised his native village, and the fields of his own farm.

Trembling with excitement she leaned over the edge of the car.

"Take care," said young Lester quickly, drawing her back, and—

perhaps from absence of mind—he kept his arm round her waist· "In five minutes we shall be on terrâ firmâ."

The words had hardly left his lips when the balloon, which had hitherto steadily descended, began slowly to rise again, borne upwards by the gentle breeze.

Ellen Fielding uttered a cry of despair, extending her arms as if she would have flown towards her home.

"Is there no way of descending?" the farmer exclaimed.

"There is one," Lester replied, "but it is frightfully dangerous."

"Anything is better than this torture."

"Well, this is our last resource. Give me your stick."

He rose cautiously to his feet, and raising the iron-shod walking-stick, tore the cover of the balloon.

It seemed to utter a sigh, as the gas rushed out impetuously at the opening. There was a moment of terrible suspense, then the torn and shrunk balloon sank with frightful rapidity, as if it were falling through space. They closed their eyes, and gave themselves up for lost.

All at once, there was a rushing, rending noise, followed by a violent shock. They looked up in terror, and found that the balloon had been caught by the upper branches of an oak tree, and the car hung only a few feet from the ground.

Towards the close of a bright day, about a week after these events, young Lester, and George Fielding were seated at an open window in the house of the latter, whose guest the young man had been ever since their aërial adventure.

Now that the first relief of their escape from peril was over, the farmer's mind had returned to its old pre-occupation, as his sister noticed with distress.

His face was shadowed at this moment, as, leaning one elbow on the broad old fashioned window-sill, he looked out vaguely, between the geraniums and fuschias across the broad sunny meadows in front of the house.

At length young Lester, whose eyes had followed his, asked abruptly: "How far does your property extend?"

Fielding turned to him with a faint smile. "You wish to know how much the richer you will be if you gain the suit."

"On my honour I was not thinking of it," the young man returned, colouring.

"You need not blush for it, if you were," his companion said quietly; "everyone believes in the justice of his own cause. I will show you which is my property."

And he pointed out, one by one, the woods, fields, and meadows which composed it.

"It is in beautiful order," was Frank Lester's remark.

'I have given it all my time and care. There are still many im

provements which I hoped to make: but who knows," he added with a sigh, "how long I may be able to call it mine?"

As he uttered these words, Ellen entered. She looked agitated, and had a letter in her hand.

"Is it from Mr. Harding?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes it is from the lawyer," she replied.

"Then the trial is over, and we shall know—give it me, Ellen."

He extended his hand for the letter, but she seized the hand in both her own and said, with a glance at Lester: "Whatever the news may be, do not forget that you two now are friends."

"Give me the letter," he repeated impatiently, disregarding her words.

She drew back a step, looking at him earnestly.

"George, have you so soon forgotten?"

There was a moment's pause, then his face changed and softened.

"No, I have not forgotten," he answered and extending his hand to his guest he continued: "We left our enmity in the clouds, Lester, and we will not take it up again directly we find ourselves on earth. Whatever the verdict may be, it will make no difference in my feelings for you."

"And for my own part I shall be almost content to lose the property if it gains me your friendship—and your sister's," replied the young man, with an eloquent glance at Ellen. She handed the letter to her brother, who opened it with a steady hand, glanced over it, and looked up.

"Lester, you are in your own house," he said quietly.

"Then I have gained the suit!" the other exclaimed.

Fielding handed him the letter, but he threw it aside, unread.

"A friend's happiness is worth more than a few acres of land," he said impetuously. "I entered your house as a guest; I will not be the one to turn you out of it. This wretched law-suit shall be as if it had never been. We will do as we had better have done at the commencement; submit the case to arbitration, and you shall select the umpire."

"But I should not know whom to choose."

Lester turned to Ellen, with a look full of tenderness.

"Let the one to whom we owe our friendship rivet its links for ever, and make it easy for us to share this inheritance to which we have both a claim."

"How can she do that?" George Fielding demanded.

"By making the friends—brothers."

Fielding drew his sister to his side, looking down with a questioning smile into her face.

"What say you to that, Ellen?"

Ellen Fielding said not a word, but hiding her blushing face on her brother's shoulder extended her hand to Frank Lester.

BEETHOVEN'S PUPIL.

IT was All Souls' Day. Groups of people might be seen passing through the Scottish gate at Vienna, wending their way through the suburbs, towards the village of Wâhring, to the cemetery that is there. In pursuance of a time-honoured custom, they were about to pay a tribute of affectionate remembrance at the graves of their beloved dead. The cemetery is a retired spot, lying apart from the din and bustle of the city, in shady seclusion. But on this day its gilded gates were opened wide: many a one would visit the place with solemn feelings ere the sun set.

On one of the paths might be seen a party of six young ladies, walking in pairs, with the order and precision of school-girls, followed by a lady-superior. They approached one of the most beautiful of the monuments, and when they reached it one of the girls stepped forward and laid a wreath of roses and immortelles at the foot of the memorial stone. It was Beethoven's grave.

"Your friend sends this offering, and she hopes to see you soon," said the young lady, crossing herself reverently as she spoke. Her companions sprinkled holy water on the wreath and on the tomb. Then the lady-superior added "Peace be to his ashes," and a pious "Amen" was echoed from the lips of her six pupils. With this the brief ceremony ended.

After a pause they were turning to retrace their steps, when an elderly gentleman, who had been an unnoticed observer of the whole scene, drew near and accosted the lady-superior with the warmth of an old acquaintance.

"What, you here, Baron S——," she exclaimed. "But no wonder, for you were one of his truest friends."

"Alas! poor Beethoven!" returned the Baron: and once more they turned their tearful eyes towards the grave. "But pray tell me," continued he, "the meaning of your little ceremony which I have witnessed, not without emotion."

The kindly eyes of the Baron rested as he said this upon the young lady who had brought the wreath, and she at once answered him frankly.

"Every year, on this day, I place a wreath on the tomb of Beethoven; to-day I have done so for the last time, for I am leaving the convent. The pious offering is made for a kind and dear old friend, the Countess Theresa Brunswick, who was Beethoven's pupil."

Some few years after this little scene had occurred in the cemetery at Wâhring, the young lady, who had borne the wreath on that occasion, was staying on a long visit with her now very aged friend, the

Countess Theresa Brunswick, and heard from her own lips many particulars of her early life, and of her friendship with Beethoven.

Born in the castle of her ancestors, Mártonvásár, in Hungary, the Countess had been reared in the midst of aristocratic notions and pompous luxury; but her mother knew the value of a good education, and no trouble was spared, in order to make her a highly accomplished woman. She was well-read in ancient and modern literature, painted admirably, carved with considerable taste and execution: but her highest gift was music. She is acknowledged by all her contemporaries to have been Beethoven's greatest pupil.

One evening as her young friend sat at her feet, she began to relate the circumstances of her first introduction to the great master.

"In those days," she said, "we usually spent the winter at Vienna. Joseph Haydn was a frequent guest at our house, and my mother asked his advice in engaging an instructor in music for me. He promised that he would send a person whom he could highly recommend. The next day, a young man appeared with a letter from the old Maestro, and but for the introduction, his appearance at first sight would certainly not have been in his favour.

"'He looks like a savage,' whispered my mother, and I smiled in acquiescence. He occupied a chair, which the servant had given him, with his eyes fixed on the carpet; his hair stood upright over his wrinkled brow; his mouth was compressed and drawn; and he sat as if ready at a moment's notice to escape through the door. I could read a refusal in my mother's looks; for she was one who attached much importance to graceful and easy manners.

"But gradually the scene changed. In the first place, my father's old dog, Hector, came from under the sofa, where he had retired, growling, as the stranger entered; having reconnoitred, he seemed to make up his mind at once that the professor was to be received as a friend. He approached his chair, wagged his tail as a sign of approval, and finally placing his beautiful head on one of the stranger's knees, looked up into his face, and seemed to wait to be caressed. The young man stroked and patted him with confidence, and, looking kindly at him, smiled. 'At any rate, he *can* smile,' I said to myself.

"Another figure came now into the group; my little brother left my mother's arm-chair, where she sat, stern as a judge. He, also, went over to the enemy; and, though nothing was said, yet he seemed to feel that he was welcome, as he took his stand by the gentleman's side. I remained near my mother, while the scene became so stamped on my mind that years afterwards I was able to paint it from memory.*

"Nobody had as yet spoken a word, for my mother was reading Haydn's letter. At length she looked up and said, 'Sir, what is your name? The Maestro has neglected to mention it.'

* This picture is still in possession of the family at Mártonvásár.

"'That is very probable, madame, as I have not yet a name,' replied he, in a wonderfully melodious voice.

"'How is that, sir? Did I misunderstand you?' asked my mother, with her most stately air.

"'Ah! yes! madame, what was I saying? True! my name is Beethoven.'

"Hurriedly and nervously he uttered these words, and rising from his seat appeared to be meditating an immediate flight. How I ventured to stop him, I know not; but I did, by saying: 'Herr Beethoven, I will take lessons of you; I will be your pupil.'

"My mother gazed at me for a moment, and then turning to the professor said, good-naturedly: 'Well! the children and their dog have decided the matter for me. Those who can gain, at first sight, the love of children and animals, cannot have very bad dispositions. As to your capability as a teacher, I have Haydn's word for that.'

"So the matter was settled: and many, many happy hours I passed with Herr Beethoven as a pupil, and afterwards as a friend." The Countess paused a moment, and a smile flitted across her countenance as she resumed: "There was one exception to the amicable nature of an intercourse, which nearly caused a separation at an early period of our acquaintance.

"When I was about sixteen years of age everybody praised my progress in music, except Beethoven, and he found fault with me much less often than at first; a fact which gave me more pleasure than all their praise. One day, however, I know not from what cause, the professor's irritability was great. My playing did not satisfy him at all. He rose from his seat, and paced the room with rapid strides. My execution did not improve in consequence, for I was almost crying with vexation. Suddenly, in a difficult part of the finale, I struck a sad discord. The next moment I felt a sharp blow on my hand, and an angry voice exclaimed: 'It is maddening to hear music tortured like this.'

"I had uttered a cry and risen from my seat; when my mother entered the room. 'What has happened?' was her first enquiry.

"'Mamma,' stammered I, 'my bad playing has vexed my dear master.'

"'The Countess has received a slap on her fingers,' burst out Beethoven.

"'Herr Beethoven!' my mother exclaimed, her voice trembling (oh, how I feared that vibration in her voice!).

"'Mamma,' I cried, 'it did not hurt!'

"'Nay, it did hurt,' exclaimed he, passionately, 'but not more than the discord.'

"'Herr Beethoven!' my mother commenced a second time: but he had vanished, leaving hat and cloak, and had fled from the room and from the house.

"In a moment I ran after him with his hat, a servant following

me with his cloak. My mother standing on the stairs called with a loud voice, 'Theresa!' the only time she ever called in vain. I overtook my preceptor before he reached the gate, the servant placed the cloak on his shoulders, and I placed his hat in his hand.

"For a moment he looked bewildered and astonished, and then his expression changed, as he said to me: 'You are an angel, and I am a bear; forgive me!' and he stooped down and kissed my hand.

"From that day we began to be friends. It took a long time to make my mother forget his rude treatment of her daughter; but at length, at a soirée at Princess Esterhazy's, when Beethoven had enchanted everyone by his music, my proud mother was conquered. Going up up to him, she offered him her hand, saying: 'Theresa is right! you are not like an ordinary man, you are a messenger from heaven!'"

In the course of that long evening's chat with the aged Countess, by the fireside, the young lady discovered a secret: the secret grief of the Countess's life. She understood, from many things that her old friend said, that the pupil had learnt to love the Maestro with all her heart, but alas! without return. Beauty was Beethoven's goddess, and though Theresa Brunswick had every other gift to make woman irresistible, that one she had not.

The great musician loved the Countess Giulietta di Guicciardi, and he, too, loved in vain. To her he dedicated the "Sonata quasi Fantasia" in C sharp minor. She it was who, in 1801, lured him back for a time into society, from which his deafness had exiled him. He gave his heart to her. She admired his talents and flattered him; but *her* heart, towards him at least, was hard as stone.

Beethoven's home was solitary to the last. No one whom he cared for, was present to soothe his last illness, or to hear the last music that his fingers, with their magic touch, called forth from the keys. He was buried with princely splendour by his fellow-citizens; but no wife or child followed him to the grave. Had he but loved Theresa Brunswick, how happy his life might have been!

The young lady ventured at last to whisper this. Even then, in her old age, a blush mantled in the face of the Countess, and with some sharpness she cried, "Peace, child!" But, a moment or two after, regaining her wonted composure, she added: "Those whom God raises as high as Beethoven, to them He rarely gives what we call worldly happiness. Sorrow is the best discipline for those who are destined to be immortal."

A CHRISTMAS PARTY ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

I.

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY.

I LIVE in an old dilapidated house, and I am alone.

Alone—yes! for all my relations are dead. Distant connections there are who will take this place after me: about them I have little concern.

People say, "Having small means, why not move into a smaller house?"

I answer, Never! There will be but one remove for me: for in this year of grace 1860 I am old and alone. Besides, to leave the old house would be to lose my identity. Its large, low rooms, its great well-staircase, its out-of-date fireplaces, have been my familiars from girlhood. Leave these, and memory would lose its prompter; interest in life—the only life I know, at least—would cease. "All houses where men have lived and died are haunted houses." That is true enough; the marvel is to me that in these days, when every manor house has been ransacked for bygone mystery and murder, no one has raked up and shaken out the mystery and murder (presumably) which was discovered in this very house, and caused such a stir throughout East Kent, when my mother was widowed, some seventy years ago.

Not that it happened then. Oh, no—years before; but the last day in the old year always reminds me of it; for it was on December 31st, 1779, that the merry party assembled which led to such dire results.

Assembled in this square, low room where I am sitting all alone; where four massive beams meet overhead, and the frieze bordering the dark oaken panel runs into all kinds of fancies; where birds of wonderful plumage wrought in stone are sitting on golden boughs in the fireplace, and in the centre is a prancing horse, the noted badge of the men of Kent.

Shall I describe the house more particularly? An old, forgotten house, built in part of materials of a much older house, once standing a quarter of a mile to the south. It has been altered repeatedly. The long roof pierced by gables, fresh windows inserted; and the twisted chimneys are gone; but the rooms, the dear old rooms, remain where all around has changed.

You can see it as you pass along the South-Eastern Railway below Ashford, just as the line takes a dip as it skirts the garden wall; and

the old house buries its face as if it scorns to look upon such a modern enormity as a railroad.

Not, indeed, on the iron horse came the guests to that Christmas party eighty years ago. Squire Darrel, from Chart, rode with his cousin on a pillion behind. Mr. Finch, Mr. Radcliffe, Mr. Toke, and Edward Dering were accompanied by ladies similarly mounted; Edward Knatchbull brought Matthew Breton and Thomas Knight in a great yellow chariot; whilst Mr. and Mrs. Norwood, Dr. Whitfield, and young Elwick walked from the neighbouring town.

In the house, in addition to my mother, there were staying two middle-aged ladies, the Misses Tappenden; Ellen S—, Lieutenant B—, and a youth named Tracy, supposed to be a cadet of a noble family of Irish extraction.

Yet little was known about him. The master of the house, who sometimes went to survey some property (as he said) on the coast, had recently returned with him. Yes! with Tracy, whose presence had such baneful influence over one young life, and whose mysterious death has been rehearsed by wakeful winds about this lonely house for many years. "Murder!" they still hoarsely shout over head amid tie-beam and rafter; "Mystery!" they softly whisper in this dark room where I am sitting.

It is an idle fancy; but guided by my mother's description so often repeated, I can place chairs where each person sat round the flaming hearth eighty years ago. To me their shadows still come and go in the twilight, and the boards creak and start as if the feet which have long walked into family vaults were yet careering round the spacious room.

Warm was the welcome which all received on that eventful day. Since the cruel winter four years before, when Hogben the börshölder was found frozen stark and stiff in the adjoining "eighteen acres," the owner of this house had taken every precaution to keep out the bitter cold. Strips of carpet, sandbags and list concealed every crevice; great logs from Bockhanger burned in the hall, day and night; and yet the house even then was cold. To me it seems colder every year.

I need hardly say that the ladies were "drest all in their best;" one or two in sacques, and others in the large bell hoops just coming into fashion, with head-dresses of a corresponding size. Indeed, so ample were the dimensions of the ladies compared with the tight-fitting clothes of the gentlemen, that old John Shorter, of Bybrook, declared, when he joined the circle, that they all looked like turnips and carrots.

Dinner was served at four o'clock. Heavy and substantial as the host himself, the only rarity being the red-legged partridge; other game, with the meat and poultry, came from the estate; and the ponderous plum pudding, girt about with quivering sprays, formed of split quills and pendent almonds, had been boiling all the previous night.

My mother, who was seventeen, had only recently left school, and the feeling of liberty, and some deeper feeling besides, caused her to look back upon this as the dinner par excellence, altogether delightful.

It was no secret. She was already engaged to the eldest son of her host, then, I am told, a youth whose genial good-nature and comeliness fairly atoned for lack of brightness of parts: in fact, my father was somewhat of a dunce.

There was another engaged couple—pale Ellen S—, with the violet eyes, my mother's young cousin, fragile as a flower, a mere child in appearance, but even then impulsive and determined to a degree which showed where the shadow might fall. Poor Ellen! she was the last of a family all grandly interred in their chantry at Brabourne; but the land, like the line, has dwindled to six feet of earth. Her lover, Lieutenant B—, was a tall, stalwart fellow; had already seen active service, and was in a fair way to promotion. As a man of the world, he was more than a match for the apparently guileless girl, playing upon her credulity, probing her intellect, and half-amused with her sallies. But he little knew her; and perhaps she dared not ask her heart if she really cared for the man who had flattered her by an assurance of his untiring love.

Many were the jokes which circulated, with the wine, about the young people. They were toasted and pledged in all kinds of ways; and although some of the remarks would rather shock the present Mrs. Grundy, they were then received with hilarity by all; for people were easily amused, and broad humour prevailed some eighty years ago. And then the dancing in the withdrawing-room overhead! Even now the tiny hooks remain which upheld the green garlands and festoons of bright ribands. Vane, the violinist from Ashford, could play only accompaniments suited to such antiquated dances as "Cuckolds all Awry," "Money Musk," "Mother Casey," "Off she goes," and "Drops of Brandy;" and a strange mischance, causing much laughter, befell stout Mrs. Radcliffe, whose heated soles stuck to the waxed floor so pertinaciously, that she was obliged to leave them behind for the remainder of the dance.

For those who did not dance, card-tables were placed in the business-room downstairs, for whist, quinze, piquet, and macao; but the master of the house properly insisted that everybody, including the servants, should stand up in the large hall for "Sir Roger de Coverley." It was then, when Ellen S— and Tracy were partners, that my mother observed the shadow which soon fell so darkly on her young life. . . . She described Tracy afterwards often and minutely. His presence was deeply impressed on her memory. The strange reticence about his birth and connections excited her curiosity, whilst the startling manner of his subsequent disappearance haunted her. He was, and is, one of the phantoms peopling this deserted house.

How well she noted his appearance that evening! He was in-

deed fair to look upon: a youth of slight build, and under the middle height; but somehow one forgot his small stature in gazing upon a smooth face fit for the canvas of a Lely. The well-curved mouth, the nose slightly aquiline, the eyebrows boldly arched and meeting, and the eyes, those "windows of the soul," set like the stars in heaven's own azure; that wavy hair, drawn stiffly back from the forehead, in the ungainly fashion of the time, and formed into a knotted club behind, but which my mother declared had once been seen for a moment falling in massive folds over his shoulders. Ah, me! that such more than earthly beauty has visited this now lone and deserted house!

I said that Ellen S— and Tracy were partners, and right merrily went the dance; and, as "Sir Roger" demands constant activity and attention, no one but my mother observed the very close intimacy which was suddenly developed between these two. Elderly people soon tired, and others fell out of the ranks; yet Tracy clung to his vis-à-vis; and she, perhaps from a spirit of bravado, swept up and down the long hall, until the head refused to govern the feet, and Tracy bore her fainting to a bench.

Dr. Whitfield was in the card-room—a mild-mannered gentleman of portly presence, with a voice like the rustle of a curtain.

"Merely what we call hysteria," whispered he.

"Humbug," rejoined the host, who did not understand the term, and who was really concerned. "John Toke, crack her knuckles, and pass a spill before her nose; now, the brandy. There, I never knew *that* fail with the ladies," as the patient sighed and shivered.

As my mother bent down with a scent-bottle, Ellen clasped her convulsively and murmured "Oh, Tracy—Tracy!"

"Hush," interposed my mother looking up, devoutly hoping that no one else heard the exclamation. Alas! the person least to be desired, Lieutenant B—, was peering over her shoulder, with an anxious, troubled look. In a moment his brow furrowed, the thin lips were compressed, and his voice broke from him like the flash of a thunder-cloud:

"She is coming to herself;" and he turned coldly away.

The general company knew nothing of this. They saw only a giddy girl overcome with exertion; afterwards laughing and talking, and blaming her own folly: and all were shortly interested in observing a custom which had never been omitted since the huge timbers of the house had been welded together.

The curiously carved clock, on the first landing of the stairs, had given in halting undertone the hour of eleven, when the guests ranged themselves in the hall in a semi-circle, some on settles, some in fiddle-backed chairs, round the blazing fire. Mulled wine was served freely and conversation became animated. It was then that Betsy Tappenden, who had been peering outside at some Kingsnorth singers, came in with a face as white as her kerchief, vowing that she

had seen a ghost. There was a rush to the back door; but nothing there was to be seen in the glimmering moonlight.

Returning to their warm places, the conversation turned naturally upon ghosts. Mr. Elwick had just heard in Bath, where it was the talk of the town, of a well-known nobleman who had died suddenly; and whose ghost had appeared to a banker at the exact moment of his lordship's decease. The banker had taken a Bible oath of its truth. Mr. Whitfield remembered being called to stanch the wounds of a foot-pad, who declared before death that he had helped to waylay and murder "as fine a feller as ever carried flint," at the entrance to Ashford. "And, what is curious," added the doctor, "though no body has been found, the occupants of a solitary farm-house called Barrow Hill, at the west end, have frequently seen, so they say, a fine military man standing in the high road, who always disappears as they near him."

Lieutenant B—, stationed in London the previous May, also astonished his hearers by a thrilling account of how he had seen thirteen convicts executed together at Tyburn, the eldest of whom, scarcely of age, had threatened to haunt the hangman during his mortal life and after.

At this point the host started up, and reminding the company that it was close upon twelve, all arose, and, joining hands, formed a circle in the centre of the hall. Motionless they stood, and silent, like the shadows they shortly became, as old Father Time gave an awful bound over the threshold. The firelight faltered and fell, the lamps seemed to grow dim, their faces whitened as spectres; yet so still were they that the measured beat of the near hand pendulum seemed as the muffled knock of the new year waiting at the door; and it was a relief when the clock began grudgingly to gasp out the remaining moments, and the old year was dead.

Then everybody's tongue was loosed like their hands; cheers, congratulations, and good wishes prevailed.

One more custom followed. Who should let the old year out and the new year in. But beware :—

> "For he who opens first the door
> To let the new year tread the floor,
> Shall see misfortune at the fore.
>
> While he who bids the old year pack
> From open casement at the back,
> Of future years shall have no lack."

"It was all nonsense, merely a fond dame's distich," cried out Mr. Toke, turning the well-worn key, as the company pressed round the door.

Tracy was about to pull it open. Miss S— stept forward to lay her hand upon his shoulder. It was too late.

"Who cares," shouted Tracy, swinging back the sturdy oak panels.

Ellen shivered: it may have been from the east wind which came fiercely in; but her face was white, and my mother fancied some secret fear possessed her. Was she right?

Out in the open air for a moment, with the young firs waving like plumes on either side, and the keen stars piercing their flakes of cloud, the large party stood listening.

The bells of Aldington, Mersham, Sevington and Willesborough were ringing joyously on the last night of December eighty years ago.

II.

THE MYSTERY.

THE Christmas hospitality continued over Twelfth-night; therefore the party, staying in the house, was not diminished for some days, during several of which nothing of importance occurred. The gentlemen, save Tracy, seemed well amused during daylight with horse and gun; indeed, there was a capital covert for snipe where the Ashford station now stands; and I believe a special source of attraction (now properly condemned) was to be found at a lonely farm-house at Quarrington, where young Nat Bull had provided a cock-pit.

Whilst my grandmother rigidly attended to domestic duties, the ladies were sometimes busy with stiff embroidery, my mother attempting to copy an Italian design sent by Horace Mann to Linton; but much of their morning was taken up in arranging the heavy mass of hair, pasteboard, and pomatum, which fashion prescribed for the head. Ellen S— was often absent, but not often alone: my mother, already old in thought, observed with much concern, a startling change in her conduct towards Tracy.

Upon their first introduction, the young gentleman had treated Ellen somewhat cavalierly. Disposed to think perhaps, like many others, that a singularly handsome person made up for want of attention or address, he had barely noticed the cordial greeting of this delicate girl. Somewhat piqued by his nonchalance, she had gone out of her way to show in what light estimation she held him. A toss of the head, a sarcastic smile, an affected air of abstraction, a hundred little points were devised, intended to pierce his self-complacency.

My mother even rebuked her once for downright rudeness. Not that Tracy cared for the rudeness. He noticed nothing. *There* I fear lay the sting. Ellen showed her vexation to my mother.

"Was ever a man so silly, so vain, so odd! Such a selfish fellow, too—no feeling!"

"If," cried my mother laughing at this tirade, "you care so little for him, I wonder you talk so much about him."

Whether Ellen saw that my mother divined the truth, that she was learning to love Tracy, and which she was unwilling to confess

even to herself, one can only surmise, but no further suspicion was aroused until the fainting scene above described. After that evening, indications were not wanting to the observant, which showed pretty plainly how matters were tending.

To Lieutenant B— Ellen submitted in company, listening to his opinions with a deference unusual to those who knew her: still the presence of Tracy seemed to exercise a fascination which she could hardly conceal. He was the magnet. His every movement and gesture she silently noted; his words made her absent to all else. To him she turned those violet eyes almost pleadingly when he one day hinted at an early departure on the morrow. When he cut his finger, a mere scratch, in tracing with a diamond "memoriâ in æternâ," on the window-pane, hers was the handkerchief which bound the wound; a handkerchief preserved ever afterwards.

Hitherto her intended husband had apparently regarded Tracy as a "beardless boy," too young and distrait to be thought of as a rival; but now the Lieutenant's spirit was moved, and notwithstanding outward calm, my mother felt certain that some dénouement was near.

On January 6th, 1780, a dull day with a leaden sky, and showers, half sleet, half rain from the south, the gentlemen had amused themselves with the royal game of goose, and the ladies in looking over "The Morning Chronicle," and in laughing at the vagaries of Joanna Southcott. At noon the clouds lifted, and several started for a walk. Tracy went to Pousy's in Ashford about a saddle, and was deputed to ask several friends for the evening. Miss Martha Tappenden and my mother took a Christmas-box to Sally Chittenden, an old servant, living on the Lea, calling at Jenner's near the church, on their return. In crossing the churchyard, they paused to read a remarkable inscription. Hearing voices in the porch (said my mother), my impulse was to move on quickly; not so Miss Martha. With true feminine curiosity, she stayed to listen. The voices were those of Lieutenant B— and Ellen S—, and the latter was pleading piteously.

"Oh, release me, I beg of you! What is the use, when I cannot really love you?"

"Ellen, you loved me but a short while since."

"I scarcely know. And when you asked me last July, I was so young; and your mother pressed me sorely."

"You have said that you loved me well. You are so soon changed!"

"Changed? Well, I *am* changed. Oh, what—what am I saying? *Do* release me from this engagement!"

"Release you! Yes: when the winding-sheet wraps me round like this chilly snow. I have a right to know what this means. Do you love any other man?"

There was a pause.

"If I thought that you dropped me—me, indeed!—for that mincing jackanapes at the Hall, I would take care that ——"

At this moment my mother began to cry; and, fearing discovery, Miss Martha Tappenden retired, doubtless reluctantly. It was thought she repeated the conversation to Tracy. During dinner and afterwards Tracy was unusually lively; in fact, quite the life of the party. Exerting his powers of conversation, he surprised all by a fund of anecdote and of foreign reminiscence, delivered without the admixture of those profane words, then common in society.

Never had Tracy seemed so engaging. With sparkling eye, and fair cheek flushed with passing excitement, the voice musical and winning in its gentleness, and the proud lip curved half in disdain, he spoke. Little marvel, said my mother, that we weak women should admire him as if he were more than mortal, or that he should cross the dark horizon of Ellen S— as an angel of light. Once only did he speak directly to Ellen; it was in the drawing-room. She had left the spinet, and Edward Norwood was about to play on the violin, when Tracy advanced to her.

"Here is the handkerchief you lent me, Miss S—. I thank you."

It was neatly folded, and my mother, sitting by, observed something like the crumpling of stiff paper as Ellen hastily put it in her bag. What *that* was will be seen afterwards. Just before supper another visitor arrived; Doctor Haffenden from Ashford, he having been called to a patient near. Whilst pleased to see him, my grandfather was greatly perplexed. There would be thirteen at the supper table, and he had a pious horror of sitting down with that number.

"Not that *I* am in the least superstitious," he thought well to say: "but upon the last three occasions when thirteen have been present, I have remarked that one of the party *did* die during the year."

"What's to be done?" exclaimed his wife, in consternation. "Shall we have Tom Drayner in?—or, perhaps, you had better sit out, Tracy."

"Che sarà, sarà," muttered Tracy, taking a seat at a side table. "If I were to jump into the saddle now, instead of six hours hence, I should best solve the difficulty"—and his brow darkened.

Feeling sorry for his vexation, shortly afterwards when people were busy eating and talking, my grandmother's kind heart prompted her quietly to make room for him. One person, at least, noticed the ominous addition, Ellen S—; and her face wore a wild, despairing look as Tracy calmly completed the fatal number, thirteen.

That was an eventful night to my mother; the particulars I give in her own words:

"My bedroom had been changed, and, alone, I occupied one recently divided over the hall. I could not sleep: recent incidents tormented my brain. The agitation of Ellen on the old year's night —that colloquy in the church porch—the demeanour of Lieutenant B—, and the strange power exercised over her by Tracy—all seemed to point to coming harm. An undefined dread kept me awake; so

still was I that my heart throbbed with painful distinctness. A tiny mouse, in its efforts to scale the water-jug, seemed like a burglar tampering with the lock of the door; fancy, too, was at work. Yet surely more than fancy was the sound of subdued voices below the window, and the crushing of gravel from a horse's hoofs. Then all was quiet again; and, creeping out of bed, I timidly drew the curtain. The moon was just rising, and the house lay in such deep shadow that I could discern nothing. Returning to bed, a sharp blow on the nose from the bed-post caused me severe pain and increased my wakefulness. Sleep I could not.

"It might have been two hours after, when sleep was just quelling active thought, that I started violently. A shot was fired; whether overhead, or beneath the window I could scarcely tell; but so loud and near seemed the report that I expected the whole household to be roused in a moment. Rising in bed I listened, oh, how intently, for the tread of hurrying feet, for voices in amazement. But no. I could only hear the tick of the pendulum on the stairs; and presently the clock struck with alarming emphasis—one—two—three! Surely somebody hears, somebody will awaken! or, are all paralysed by fear? Tracy should start at this hour: where was he? Not a sound, not a word anywhere. I *must* have been mistaken in that shot. Excitement, perchance, was weaving fiercer fancies in the brain. I lay down chilled with fear. Overhead the tiny mouse was pattering on the tester like drops of rain. At length, I fell asleep.

"The sun was shining full in my window when I awoke. At first I was inclined to accept as reality the mysterious noises of the night. Ah! would that I had acted on this belief! But in the broad daylight such terror and suspicion looked absurd; and the idea of raising the laugh against myself by mentioning a disturbance which nobody else heard kept me quiet. Yet—what blood was that on the pillow? a circular stain the size of a spade guinea. Oh! I guessed at once; my nose must have bled a little from its blow on the bed-post. Ah! thought I, upon descending the great well-staircase to the breakfast-table, how easily things are explained! And I suppose there could have been no shot, after all!

"Tracy was not present. He had gone away, earlier than was expected (someone remarked) taking his favourite horse.

"Lieutenant B— was quite facetious, and apparently on affectionate terms with Ellen. The guests were all leaving that day."

III.

THE DISCOVERY.

NINE years passed with their solemn succession of birth, bridal, and and burial; and many who joyfully celebrated the advent of 1780 were now no more. The household at the old Hall had sadly

changed. My grandfather was dead. His only son and child, who had married my mother, had also recently died in his prime, after being crippled for many months from a fall from the new Dover coach. Thus, the only inmates of the Hall were my grandmother and my mother, both widows, and myself, a child of five. Lieutenant, now Captain B—, had greatly distinguished himself in the Gordon Riots of 1781. He had then married Ellen S—, and lived much abroad. Rarely did they write; and the letters were not cheerful. The wife bemoaned her husband's harsh and exacting temper; the husband spoke of his wife's wayward disposition, and even hinted at hallucinations. As to the supremely handsome Tracy, nothing had been heard of him since leaving the Hall: which was most strange. My grandfather was anxious, and once traced him by description to Abbeville; and Captain B— asserted that he had seen him at Ranelagh; but nothing could clearly be ascertained.

It was now that my grandmother saw among the first obituary notices in "The Times" that relating to her very old friend Mrs. Delany; and she hastened to Windsor (no slight undertaking in those days), intending afterwards to pay a series of visits in London, leaving my mother and myself alone in this deserted house. My mother was naturally of a nervous temperament; and, as the depressing gloom of winter deepened (a winter long remembered in Kent as equalling in severity that of 1767, when the snow lay five feet deep all around for many weeks), she began to take a morbid interest in the strange sounds which after sunset seem ever, from some unexplained cause, to wander about these old rooms. The springing of a board made her start; the veering of the rusty vane caused a chill, as if some one were walking over her grave; and when one of the heavy doors was jarred open by the draught, she dared not raise her eyes lest they should rest upon some weird visitor. The long hall and passage separated her from the servants; so that her fears were magnified by isolation. And yet, it was not *fear*, she said, but a feeling of awe which possessed her, as if there were something to be revealed, and which she could not shake off. What was to follow, it were best to relate in her own words:

"I was sitting in this very chair on Monday evening the 22nd of December, tracing old faces in the firelight, recalling the pleasant days of long ago, and expecting the return of your dear grandmother every moment. Suddenly there arose a wailing and a sobbing, as of a female in distress, sometimes distant, then close under the window. Calling the servants, I hurried out. A muffled form was standing there, which I thought to be your grandmother, who might have walked from the London mail at Street End.

"'Come at last!' I exclaimed, leading her to the fire.

"'Yes!' was the mournful response, 'come at last.' I let fall the hand, deeply moved, for the tones were strange, yet familiar. Another moment and I recognised the face of my cousin, Ellen S— that is

Mrs. B—. Yet what a change! Always delicate and fragile, she looked worn to a shadow; the thin lips scarcely covering the set teeth. Those eyes of violet hue, still beautiful, were bathed in tears. I scarcely knew what to say.

"'How cold you are, Ellen——,' kissing her.

"'Very cold. I have been round and round this house ever so long. *He* beckoned me on and on, even here; and now he is hiding from me! But I saw him at the pond; and I saw him enter the open door behind you ten minutes ago. Where is he?'

"'Where—who?' said I in amazement. 'Your husband?'

"'No! *he* is dead, my husband. I mean Tracy—Tracy.'

"I at once guessed the truth. Rooted in the depth of her being was her love for Tracy. It had gathered strength with years. Other love might have grazed the surface, this had pierced the heart and mastered the mind, causing every nerve to tremble at his name, and the mind had proved unequal to the strain of this one all dominant and exciting thought. I sought to soothe her.

"'You are tired, my dear Ellen, and must want food. What shall it be—a little capon with a glass of wine, or a dish of foreign tea? Here it all is: I had it ready for some one else.'

"'Then you expected him! I knew I was right!'

"'Expected Mr. Tracy! Heart alive, no! Nobody cares to come to me.'

"'Nobody cares to come to *me*,' she repeated dejectedly; 'but I will go to him. I must find him. Yes, it is his will, his *command*. See here!' unfolding a scrap of paper nearly asunder. 'He wrote that, and he gave it to me on that last night when he hid himself in this house. You know?'

"I remembered that night only too well, as I took the paper.

"'My dearling,—It is not too late. My love is as fire compared with his icy heart. I see you feel it. Accept it *now*; if not, it shall follow you as an angel. But when misery comes its force will be felt as anguish, and you will, you *must* turn to one who by right of preference can claim you.'

"It was useless to reason, and I busied myself in pressing food upon Ellen and comforting her. What she meant about Tracy coming into the house I could not imagine. We got her to bed. There she remained during many weeks, even until the anemone and blue bell were thick in Pole-tree wood, and the rooks fluttered round their nests in the adjoining elms. Still possessed by Tracy's image; still haunted by the consciousness that he was somewhere near, she used to sit, gentle and tractable as a child, in the large warm window in the drawing-room looking towards Collier's Hill. Usually considered harmless, there were occasions when her spirit was moved with restless energy, and she wandered wildly about in search of

him whose name was ever on her lips. The anniversary of her meeting with Tracy was one of these occasions. As it came round, poor Ellen's restlessness increased. Too well I remember (continues my mother) that eventful Wednesday, December 22nd, 1790, when she was seized with a desire to be dressed in a costume like that which she wore eleven years before. To pacify her we mounted into the huge lumber-room which extends the whole length of the roof, where on some loose planks were placed two chests of disused clothing. Having made our selection we descended, lingering behind with strange persistency. As the evening approached, she, who was always influenced by atmospheric disturbance, was greatly agitated by one of the most terrific thunderstorms that ever swept over this part of Kent. Old men still dwell upon this calamitous tempest at so unusual a time; and, there were not wanting those who saw in the lurid sky a reflection of the blood-red hand which was then fiercely guiding the destinies of France. Two churches were struck in Romney Marsh; a flock of sheep killed in the Falcon field; and the wheat-stacks fired at Highgate Farm. There was a lull about eleven o'clock; and, giving Ellen in charge of Lucy Lacton, you were taken to your grandmother's room and I went to bed also, but not to sleep. It was the same bed in the same position, and I could not help recalling my former terror just eleven years before. Presently the storm returned, with heavy rain and hail. The lightning quivered far brighter than my lamp, and the crackling thunder awoke the slumbering echoes in these silent rooms. It seemed too, as if all the winds had met overhead, and were delivering the story of their passage over the earth. There was a sound of low moaning wafted from the breath of the dying; and a gentle symphony stolen from infant lips; and, at times a fierce frenzy borne in haste from a madman's cell, which shook the timbers of the roof and made the old house reel again; and, mingling with these, was a voice more human than all, piercing the thick walls with its entreaty for help. Ellen had escaped from her slumbering companion! Rising in haste, I followed the affrighted servants up the wide staircase into the vast lumber room. The lightning glimmered in the crevices of the tiles, the heavy rain hissed in our ears; and, looking forwards I saw a sight which was traced on my brain for ever in characters of fire.

"There stood Ellen, fully dressed as of old, with a flaring wick by her side. She had moved the heavy chests and thrown aside the loose planks; and with a wild look of triumph in those violet eyes she stood statue-like pointing downwards. We shrieked with dismay. For there, at her feet—pressed and flattened between the rough joists lay the skeleton of a man. The garments were scanty, but looking at that still luxuriant hair fallen in matted folds at the back, it needed not the flowered vest of silk, or the tarnished buckles of a design unique, to identify him whom we knew so well.

"'There! there!' cried Ellen, stamping her foot, 'I knew I was

right; he was hiding from me here. For months I have called to him, and he has answered feebly and more feebly; and I have groped by daylight and by dark to find him. Tracy, why are you here?'

"Too intent upon the startling object, to notice her words, at my request George Knowles gently raised the head. Something fell with a metallic ring on the plaster beneath. It was a bullet. Ellen seized it, and wandered hastily to a door in the outer wall (used for the hoisting of corn and wool), which the hurricane had blown open. Apprehensive of danger, I walked warily along the beams which formed the floor, to the spot, carrying a lamp. Alas! I was not in time. She stood on the door-sill, turning her treasure to what she supposed was the light. At that moment a vivid flash of forked lightning showed her what it was. Dazed by the blinding flash, she staggered; and, oh, horror of horrors, stept forward into vacancy!

"Kind doctor Whitfield came in haste; but that fall of twenty feet had rendered surgical skill useless. There she lay in the darkened hall, more beautiful in death than in life: and even *his* professional placidity was disturbed, when upstairs he examined the remains of the handsome Tracy.

"It was not the sight of a former acquaintance; it was not the cause of death that surprised him. 'The remains,' said he, 'my dear madam, *are those of a woman.*'"

My mother adds. "Now I can see, if not explain, it all. The voices on that eventful night, eleven years ago, *were* a reality; *but whose* were they? The distant sound of hoofs was Tracy's favourite horse being allured away.

"After that, doubtless, Lieutenant B— sought Tracy in that lonely bedroom; merely a dark recess within the west gable, only used when the house was full; and challenged him. Tracy would hurry on a few clothes, and the encounter took place in the adjoining chamber; or, rather in that vast space under the roof which I have described. Possibly they fired simultaneously, as I heard but one report; and that blood on my pillow was not mine, but the life blood of Tracy as he fell with a bullet through the brain; the life blood oozing through the ceiling just below where he was; pattering on the tester as the feet of a tiny mouse, and falling drop by drop almost on my face. Or—was it *not* a duel?"

They were buried in the churchyard of an adjoining parish at the South East angle of a chantry chapel. One coffin contained both. The turf has grown over the flat stone; although the text on it, long apparent, excited the interest of the stranger: "We see through a glass darkly."

The very act of transcribing these remarkable incidents has silvered the dull routine of daily life. The past is before me. Bright remembrances, like December meteors, sweep across the dark horizon. I forget that I am old and alone.

M. ELLEN EDWARDS. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"Mrs. Keen was having her sign repainted."

THE ARGOSY.

FEBRUARY, 1880.

THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

CHAPTER IV.

HERON DYKE AND ITS INMATES.

THE Denisons—or Denzons, as they used formerly to spell their name—were one of the oldest families in that part of Norfolk in which Heron Dyke was situated. They could trace back their descent in a direct line as far as the reign of Henry the Third, but beyond that their pedigree was lost in the mists of antiquity. Who was the first member of the family that settled at Heron Dyke, and how he came by the estate, were moot points which it was hardly likely would ever be satisfactorily cleared up after such a lapse of time. The Denisons had never been more than plain country squires. Several female members of the family had married people of title, but none of the males had ever held anything more than military rank. James the Second had offered a barony to the then head of the family, and the second George a baronetcy to the squire of that day, but both offers had been respectfully declined.

No family in the county was better known either by name or reputation than the Denisons—the "Mad Denisons," as they were often called, and had been called any time these three hundred years. Not that any of them had ever been charged with lunacy, or had been shut up in a madhouse; but they had always been known as an excitable, eccentric race, full of "queer notions," addicted to madcap pranks and daredevil feats, such as seldom failed to astonish, and sometimes frighten their quiet neighbours, and had long ago earned for them the unenviable sobriquet mentioned above.

A Gilbert Denison it was who, in the reign of William and Mary, wagered a hundred guineas that on a certain fifth of November he would have a bigger bonfire than his near friend and neighbour,

Colonel Duxberry. A bigger bonfire he certainly had, for with his own hand he fired three of the largest hayricks on the farm, and so won the wager.

A later Squire Denison it was who, when his father died and he should have come into the estate, was nowhere to be found and did not turn up till two years afterwards. He had quarrelled with his parents and run away from home; and he was ultimately found earning his living as a bare-back rider in a country circus. He it was who, when his friend the clown called upon him a year or two later to beg the loan of a sovereign, dressed the man up in one of his own suits and introduced him to his guests at table as a distinguished traveller just returned from the East. Old Lord Fosdyke, who sat next the clown at dinner and was much taken with him, made a terrible to-do when he was told of the hoax that had been played off upon him: ever afterwards he refused to speak to or recognise Mr. Denison in any way.

Two other heads of the family lost their lives in duels; one of them by the hand of his dearest friend, with whom he had had a difference respecting the colour of a lady's eyebrows: the other by a stranger, with whom he had chosen to pick a quarrel "just for the fun of the thing." There was an old distich well known to the country folk for twenty miles round Heron Dyke, which sufficiently emphasised the popular notion of the family's peculiarities. It ran as under:

> "Whate'er a Denzon choose to do,
> Need ne'er surprise, nor me nor you."

The existing mansion at Heron Dyke was the third which was known to have been built on the same site or in immediate proximity to it. The present house bore the date 1616, the one to which it was the successor having been destroyed by fire. There was a tradition in the family that the whilom lord of Heron Dyke set fire to the roof-tree of the old mansion with his own hand, hoping by such summary method to exorcise the ghost of a girl dressed in white and having a red spot on her breast, which would persist in rambling through the upper chambers of the house during that weird half-hour when the daylight is dying, and night has not yet come. He had lately brought home his bride, and the young wife vowed that she would go back to her mother unless the ghost were got rid of. It is to be presumed that the means adopted proved effectual, since there seems to be no further record of the girl in white ever having put in an appearance afterwards.

The present mansion of Heron Dyke formed three sides of an oblong square. A low, broad, lichen-covered wall made up the fourth side, just outside of which ran the moat, a sluggish stream some ten or a dozen feet broad, spanned by an old stone bridge grey with age. The house, which was but two stories high, was built of the black flints so common in that part of the country, set in some sort

of cement which age had hardened to the consistency of stone. Here and there the dull uniformity of the thick walls was relieved by diaper-patterned pilasters of faded red brick. The high, narrow, lozenge-paned windows were set in quaintly carved mullions of reddish freestone, the once sharp outlines of which were now blurred with age. The steep, high-pitched roof was covered with blue-black tiles which at one time had been highly glazed, but the rains and snows of many winters had dimmed their brightness, while in summer many-coloured mosses found lodgment in their crevices and patched them here and there with beauty. The tall, twisted chimneys of deep-red brick lent their warmth and colouring to the picture.

There were dormer windows in the roofs of the two wings, but none in the main building itself. The grand entrance was reached by a flight of broad, shallow steps, crowned with a portico that was supported by five Ionic columns: a somewhat incongruous addition to a house that otherwise was thoroughly English in all its aspects. In front of the house was a large oval lawn clumped with evergreens and surrounded by a carriage drive. The stables and domestic offices were hidden away at the back of the house, where also were the kitchen-garden, the orchard, and a walled-in flower garden, into which looked the windows of Mr. Denison's favourite sitting-room. Just inside the low, broad wall, that bounded the moat, grew seven tall poplars, known to the cottagers and simple fisher-folk thereabouts as "The Seven Maidens of Heron Dyke."

The park was not of any great extent, the distance from the moat to the lodge gates on the high-road to Nullington being little more than half a mile. But it was well wooded and had nothing formal about it, and such as it was it seemed a fitting complement to the old house that looked across its pleasant glades. The house was built in a sheltered hollow not quite half a mile from the sea. It was protected on the north by a shelving cliff that was crowned with a light-house. Behind it the ground rose gradually and almost imperceptibly for a couple of miles till the little town of Nullington was reached. Not far from the southern corner of the Hall, was an artificial hillock of considerable size and some fifty or sixty feet in height, which was thickly planted with larches. The park, in front of the house swept softly upward to its outermost wall. Beyond that, was a protecting fringe of young larches and scrubwood, then the ever-shifting sand dunes, and, last of all, the cold grey waters of the North Sea. For miles southward the land was almost as flat as a billiard table. The fields were divided by dykes which had been dug for drainage purposes, with here and there a fringe of pollard willows to break the dead level of monotony. The sea was invisible from the lower windows of the Hall, but there was a fine view of it from the dormer windows in the north wing, and here Ella Winter had had a room fitted up especially for herself. Had you ever slept at Heron Dyke on a winter night when a strong landward breeze was blowing, you

would have been hushed to rest by one of nature's most majestic monotones. When you lay down and when you arose, you would have had in your ears the thunderous beat of countless thousands of white-lipped angry waves on the long level reaches of sand, that stretched away southward for miles as far as the eye could reach.

When Gilbert Denison, uncle to the present squire of Heron Dyke, died from the results of an accident, at his lodgings in Bloomsbury Square, and when the strange provisions of his will came to be noised abroad, there was no lack of ill-advisers, who did their best to induce the youthful heir to contest the validity of the dead man's will. But young Gilbert knew that his uncle had never been saner in his life than when he planned that particular proviso; besides which, he was far too proud of his family name to drag the will of a Denison through the mire of the law courts. His uncle, who had always been looked upon as a sober, thrifty, bucolic-minded sort of man, had not failed to redeem the family reputation for eccentricity at the last moment, and young Gilbert had an idea that it was just the sort of thing he himself would have been likely to do under similar circumstances.

To the surprise of his boon companions, he quietly accepted the situation thus forced upon him, and determined to make the best of it. After giving a farewell symposium to the friends who had so kindly helped him to sow his wild oats, London saw him no more for several years. He settled down at Heron Dyke, and became as staid and sober a specimen of a country gentleman as a Denison was ever likely to become. His somewhat shattered constitution was now nursed with all the care and tenderness he could call up. If it were in the power of man to defeat that last hateful clause in his uncle's will, he was the man to do it.

"He will be sure to choose a wife before long," said all the anxious matrons in the neighbourhood who had eligible daughters waiting to be mated. But Gilbert Denison did nothing of the kind. Years went by. He became a middle-aged man, then an elderly man, and all hope of his ever changing his bachelor condition gradually died away. There was a constantly floating rumour in the neighbourhood of a romantic attachment and a disappointment when he was young; but it might be nothing more than an idle story. It was even said that the lady had jilted him in favour of his cousin, and that there would have been bloodshed between the two men had not the other Gilbert hurried away with his young wife to Italy.

It was this other Gilbert, or his descendants, who would come in for the Heron Dyke estates, should the present squire not live to see his seventieth birthday. There was no love lost between the senior and junior branches of the family. The estrangement begun in early life only widened with years. Its continuance, if not its origin, was probably due to the squire's hard and unforgiving disposition. The other side had more than once made friendly overtures

to the head of the house: but the squire would have none of them. He hated the whole "vile crew," root and stump, he said; and if any one of them ever dared to darken his threshold, he vowed that he would shoot him without compunction. It was Squire Denison's firm and fixed belief that the spies sometimes seen around his house —for spies he declared them to be—were emissaries of his relatives, sent to see whether he was not likely to die before his seventieth birthday.

We made the squire's acquaintance at his interview with Captain Lennox, after the return of the latter from London. His sixty-ninth birthday was just over. Could he but live eleven months more, all would be well. Ella Winter, in that case, would be heiress to all he had to leave, for he should will it to her; and his hated cousin, and his cousin's family, would be left out in the cold, as they deserved to be. As everybody knew, the squire had been more or less of an invalid for many years; but latterly his complaint had assumed a rather alarming character, and there were weeks together when he never crossed the threshold of his own rooms. His disorder was a mortal one—one that would most certainly carry him off at no very distant date—but that was a fact known to himself and Dr. Spreckley alone.

For the last twenty years the squire had not kept up an establishment at the Hall in accordance with his income and position in the county. There was Aaron Stone, his faithful old body-servant and major-domo, and Aaron's wife, who was almost as old as he was. There was the old couple's handsome grandson, Hubert, who was the squire's steward, bailiff, gamekeeper, and sometimes secretary and companion. There were the gardener and his wife at the lodge on the Nullington road. When to these were added a coachman, a stable-boy, and two or three women-servants, the whole of the establishment was told. Mr. Denison had not given a dinner-party for years; or, for the matter of that, gone to one. Now and then an old acquaintance—such as the vicar, or Sir Peter Dockwray, or Colonel Townson—would drop in unceremoniously, and take the chance of whatever there happened to be for dinner; but beyond such casual visitants, very little company was kept.

Mr. Denison had been compelled to give up horse exercise some few years ago. He took his airings in a lumbering, old-fashioned brougham, which might have been stylish and handsome once. Very often nothing occupied the shafts but a grey mare, that was nearly as lumbering as the vehicle itself. Old Aaron could get its best paces out of it when he drove it in the dog-cart to Nullington market and back. Ella Winter had a young chestnut filly for riding, powerful yet gentle, for which her uncle had given quite a fancy price. Another horse in the squire's stables was a big, serviceable hack, which Hubert Stone looked upon as being for his sole use; indeed, no one but himself ever thought of mounting it. He rode

it here and there when about the squire's business; and sometimes, perhaps, when about his own. Better than all else he liked to accompany Ella when she went out riding. He would be dressed somewhat after the style of a gentleman farmer, in cut-away coat, buckskins, and top-boots. He did not ride by the side of Ella as an equal would have done, nor yet so far behind her as a groom. Many were the comments passed by the gossips of Nullington when they encountered Miss Winter and her handsome attendant cantering along the country roads, or quiet lanes that led to nowhere in particular.

Mr. Denison was well seconded in his saving propensities by his old servant, Aaron Stone. Aaron was born on the Heron Dyke estate, as had been his ancestors before him for two hundred years. Thus it fell out that, at the age of nineteen, he was appointed by the late squire to attend his nephew when he set out on the Grand Tour, and from that day to the present he had never left him. There were many points of similarity in the tempers and dispositions of master and man. Both of them were obstinate, cross-grained men, with strong wills of their own, and both of them were inclined to play the small tyrant as far as their opportunities would allow. They grumbled at each other from January till December, but were none the less true friends on that account. No other person dare say to the squire a tithe of the things that Aaron said with impunity, and probably no other servant would have put up with Mr. Denison's wayward humours and variable temper as Aaron did. Twenty times a year the squire threatened to discharge his old servant as being lazy, wasteful, and good-for-nothing; and a month seldom passed without Aaron vowing that he would pack up his old hair trunk, and never darken the doors of Heron Dyke again. But neither of them meant what he said.

Aaron's wife, Dorothy, had been a Nullington girl, and had heard people talk about the Denisons of Heron Dyke ever since she could remember anything. She was now sixty-five years old: a little, withered, timid woman, slightly deaf, and very much in awe of her husband. She believed in dreams and omens, and was imbued with all sorts of superstitious fancies local to the neighbourhood and to the Hall. Perhaps her deafness had something to do with her reticence of speech, for she was certainly a woman of very few words, who went about her duties in a silent, methodical way, and did not favour strangers.

One son alone had blessed the union of Aaron and Dorothy. He proved to be something of a wild spark, and ran away from home before he was one-and-twenty. Subsequently he joined a set of strolling players, and a year or two later he married one of the company. The young lady whom he made his wife was reported to come of a good family, and, like himself, was said to have run away from home. Anyhow, they did not live long to enjoy their wedded

happiness. Four years later the little boy, Hubert, fatherless and motherless, was brought to Heron Dyke, and then it was that Aaron Stone learnt for the first time that he had a grandson.

The squire was pleased with the lad's looks, and took pity on his forlorn condition. He was sent to Easterby, and brought up by one of the fishermen's wives, and when he was old enough he was put to a good school, Mr. Denison paying all expenses. He always spent his holidays at the Hall, and there it was, when he was about twelve years old, that he first saw Ella, who was his junior by two years. Children, as a rule, think little of the differences of social rank; at all events, Ella did not, and she and handsome, bright-eyed Hubert soon became great friends. Mr. Denison, if he noticed the intimacy, did not disapprove of it. They were but children, and no harm could come of it; and perhaps it was as well that Ella should have someone with her besides Nero, the big retriever, when she went for her lonely rambles along the shore, or gathering nuts and blackberries in the country lanes. This pleasant companionship—both pleasant and dangerous to Hubert, young though he still was—was renewed and kept up every holiday season till the boy was sixteen. Then all at once there came a great gap. Ella was sent abroad to finish her education, and although she saw her uncle several times in the interim, Hubert, as it happened, saw no more of her till she came home for good at nineteen years of age. But before this came about, Hubert's own career in life had been settled: at least, for some time to come. When the boy was seventeen the squire decided that he had had enough schooling, and that it was time for him to set about earning his living. How he was to set about it was apparently a point that required some consideration; meanwhile, the boy stayed on at Heron Dyke. He was a bold rider and a good shot. He wrote an excellent hand, and was quick at figures. In fact, he was an intelligent, teachable young fellow, who had made good use of his opportunities at school: moreover, he could keep his temper well under control when it suited him to do so; and, little by little, the squire began to find him useful in many ways. He himself was growing old, and Aaron got more stupid every year that he lived. By-and-bye nothing more was said about Hubert having to earn a living elsewhere. He relieved the squire of many duties that had become irksome to him; and when a man of his years has once dropped a burden he rarely cares to pick it up again. In short, by the time Hubert was twenty years old he had made himself thoroughly indispensable to the squire.

No one but Hubert himself ever knew with what a fever of unrest he awaited the coming home of Ella Winter. Had she forgotten him? Would she recognise him after all these years? How would she greet him? He tormented himself with a thousand vain questions. He knew now that he loved her with all the devotion of a deeply passionate heart.

Miss Winter came at last. The moment her eyes rested on Hubert she recognised him, changed though he was. She came up to him at once and held out her hand. "When I see so many faces about me that I remember, then I know that I am at home," she said, looking into his eyes with that sweetly serious look of hers.

Hubert touched her hand, blushed, and stammered; although, as a rule, there were few young men more self-possessed than he was. At the same moment a chill ran through him. His heart seemed as if it must break. The Ella of his day-dreams—the bright-eyed, sunny-haired little maiden who had treated him almost like a brother, who had grasped his wrist when she leaped across the runlets in the sands, who had imperiously ordered him to drag down the tall branches of the nut-trees till the fruit was within her reach—had vanished from his ken for ever. In her stead stood Miss Winter, a strangely-beautiful young lady, whose face was familiar and yet unfamiliar. As he saw and recognised this, he saw, too, and recognised for the first time, the impassable gulf that divided them. She was a lady, the daughter of an ancient house: he was not a gentleman, and nothing could ever make him one, at least in her eyes, or in the eyes of the world to which she belonged. He was a son of the soil. He was Gurth the swineherd, and she was the Lady Rowena. What folly, what madness, to love one so utterly beyond his reach!

CHAPTER V.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

"You must go round to the side door if you have any business here," cried a shrill, angry, quavering voice, from an upper window, in answer to the loud knocking of a stranger at the main entrance to Heron Dyke. Edward Conroy—for he it was—could not at first make out where the voice came from, but when he stepped from under the portico and glanced upward, he saw a withered face protruded from one of the upper windows, and a skinny hand and arm pointing in the direction of a door which he now noticed for the first time in a corner of the right wing. For the first time, too, he now saw that the grim old door at which he had been knocking looked as if it had not been opened for years, and that the knocker itself was rusty from disuse. Even the steps that led up to the portico were falling into disrepair, and through the cracks and crevices tiny tufts of grass and patches of velvety moss showed themselves here and there.

Conroy descended the steps slowly, and then turned to take another look at the grey old house, which he had never seen before to-day. The first view of it, as he crossed the bridge over the moat, had not impressed him favourably. But now that he looked at it again, the quaint formality of its lines seemed to please him better.

It might have few pretensions to architectural dignity; but, with the passage of years, there had come to it a certain harmoniousness such as it had never possessed when it was new. Summer sun and winter rain had not been without their effect upon it. They had toned down the hardness of its original outlines: its coldness seemed less cold, its formality not so formal, as they must once have seemed. It was slowly mellowing in the soft, sweet air of antiquity.

He noticed, as he walked along the front of the house from the main entrance to the side door, that the entire range of windows on the ground floor had their shutters fastened, and those of the upper floor their blinds drawn down. His heart chilled for a moment as the thought struck him that someone might perhaps be lying dead inside the house. But then he reflected that he should surely have heard such a thing spoken of at the village inn, where he had slept last night. Was it not, rather, that the house had always the same shut-up look that it wore to-day?

Conroy knocked at the side door, a heavy door also, and was answered by the loud barking of a dog. After waiting for what seemed an intolerable time, he heard footsteps in the distance, which slowly drew nearer. The door was unbolted, and opened as far as the chain inside would permit. Through this opening peered forth the crabbed, wizened face of an old man—of a man with a pointed chin, and a long nose, and eyes that were full of suspicion and ill-humour.

"And what may be your business at Heron Dyke?" he demanded, in a harsh, querulous voice, after a look that took in the stranger from head to foot.

"Be good enough to give this card to Mr. Denison, and if he can spare two minutes ——"

"He won't see any strangers without he knows their business first," interrupted the old man, brusquely, as he turned the card to the light that was streaming through the open doorway into the dim corridor in which he stood, and read the name printed on it. "Never heard of you before," he added. "Maybe you are a spy—a mean, dastardly spy," he continued, after a pause, still eyeing the young man suspiciously from under his thick white eyebrows.

"A spy! No, I am not a spy. Have you any spies in these parts?"

"Lots of them."

"And what do they come to spy out?"

"That's none of your business, sir, so long as you're not one—though that has to be proved," answered the crusty old man, as he went away with the card, leaving Conroy outside.

He turned, and began to pace the gravelled pathway in front of the door. "Is my sweet princess here, I wonder, and shall I succeed in seeing her?" he said to himself. "Very like a wild-goose chase, this errand of mine. To see her once in London for a couple

of hours—to fall in love with her then and there—to come racing down to this out-of-the-world spot, weeks afterwards, on the bare possibility of seeing her again—when she probably remembers no more of me than she does of any other indifferent stranger—what can that be but the act of a ——"

Light footsteps were coming swiftly down the stone corridor. Conroy's face flushed, and a strange eager light leapt into his eyes. There was a rustle of garments, then the heavy chain dropped, the door swung wide on its hinges, and Ella Winter stood revealed to Conroy's happy gaze.

His card was in her hand. She glanced from it to his face, and, a momentary blush mounting to her cheek, she advanced a step or two and held out her hand. "Mr. Conroy," she said, "I have not forgotten your sketches. Or you either," she added, as if by an after-thought, a smile playing round her lips by this time, coming and going like May sunshine.

She led the way in, and he followed. The long, flagged corridor, with its dim light, struck him with a chill, after coming out of the bright air. Ella entered a small, oak-panelled room, plainly and heavily furnished, and invited Mr. Conroy to sit down.

"We live mostly at the back of the house," she observed. "My uncle prefers the rooms to those in front."

"It is a grand old house," answered Conroy. "And what might it not be made!" he added to himself.

"You received your portfolio of sketches back safely, Mr. Conroy, I hope. My aunt left them at your address that day when we went out for our drive."

"Did you indeed leave them! Were you so good?"

"Sketches such as those are too valuable to be trusted to the chance of loss," said Ella.

"I was so very sorry not to call again on Mrs. Carlyon, as I had promised," he continued, "but the next day but one I had to leave town. I wonder what she thought of me?"

"I don't think she thought at all," replied Ella ingenuously—"though she would, I am sure, have been glad to see you. Aunt Gertrude was too full of her loss in those days to notice who visited her. On the evening of the party she lost her jewels."

"Lost her jewels!" exclaimed Conroy. "Do you mean those she wore?"

"No, no. Her casket of jewels was stolen from her dressing-room. Some of them were very valuable. The case was left on her dressing-table, and it disappeared during the evening."

"Was the case itself stolen?"

"We thought so that night, but the next morning when the housemaids were sweeping her boudoir—the room in which we looked at your sketches, if you remember—they found the case on the floor, ingeniously hidden behind the window curtain."

"Empty?"

"Oh, of course. The thief had taken the contents and left the case. Aunt Gertrude can hear nothing of them."

"I hope and trust she will find them," was Mr. Conroy's warm answer. And then he went on, after a perceptible pause. "I think you know already, Miss Winter, that I am connected with the press. The world being quiet just now, my employers, having nothing better for me to do, have found a very peaceful mission for me for the time being. They have sent me into this part of the country to take sketches of different old mansions and family seats, and I am here to-day to seek Mr. Denison's permission to make a couple of drawings of Heron Dyke."

Ella hesitated for a moment or two, toying nervously with Conroy's card, which she still held. Then she spoke.

"My uncle is a confirmed invalid, Mr. Conroy, and very much of a recluse. Strangers, or indeed acquaintances whom he has not met for a long time, are unwelcome to him, even when there is no need for him to see them personally. Whether he will see you, or grant you the permission you ask for, without seeing you, is more than I can tell. I will, however, try my best to induce him to do so."

"Thank you very much," said Conroy. "I certainly should like to take some sketches of this old house: but, rather than put Mr. Denison out of the way, or cause the slightest annoyance in the matter, I will forego ——"

"Certainly not," Ella hastily interrupted: "at least, until I have spoken to my uncle. If he would but see you it might rouse him from the lethargy that seems to be gradually creeping over him, and would do him good. To receive more visitors would be so much better for him! You will excuse me for a few minutes, will you not?"

"What a life for this fair young creature to lead!" Conroy said to himself as soon as she was gone. "To be shut up in this gloomy old house with a querulous hypochondriac who suspects an enemy in every stranger and dreads he knows not what: but it seems to me that women can endure things that would drive a man crazy. Would that I were the knight to rescue her from this wizard's grasp and take her out into the sweet sunlight!"

He stood gazing out of the window, tapping the panes lightly with his fingers and smiling to himself, lost in dreams.

"My uncle will see you," said Ella, as she re-entered the room.

"Thank you for your kind intervention."

"He is in one of his more gracious moods to-day: but you must be careful not to contradict him if you wish to obtain his sanction to what you require. And now I will show you to his room."

After traversing two or three flagged passages, Conroy was ushered into a room which might have been an enlarged copy of the one he

had just left. It was the same room in which Captain Lennox's interview took place on the night of his return from London. Aaron Stone was coming out as Conroy went in. The old man greeted him with a queer, sour look, and some uncomplimentary remark, muttered to himself. Then he went out and banged the heavy door noisily behind him.

"S—s—s—s! That confounded door again!" exclaimed a rasping, high-pitched voice from behind the screen at the farther end of the room. "Will that old rapscallion never remember that I have nerves? Ah—ha! if I could but cuff him as I used to do!" added the squire, breaking off with a fit of coughing.

Ella held up a warning finger and waited without moving till all was quiet again. She glided across the polished, uncarpeted floor and passed in front of the screen. Conroy waited in the background.

"I have brought Mr. Conroy to see you, Uncle Gilbert—the gentleman who wants to take some sketches of the Hall," said Ella in tones a little louder than ordinary.

"And who gave you leave, young lady, to introduce any strangers here? Why ——"

"You yourself gave me leave, uncle, not many minutes ago," she quietly interposed. "You said that you would see Mr. Conroy."

"Did I, child?"

"Certainly you did."

"Then my memory must be failing me faster than I thought it was." Here came a deep sigh followed by a moment or two of silence. "You are right, Ella. I remember it now. Let us see what this bold intruder is like."

Conroy stepped forward in front of the screen and saw before him the Master of Heron Dyke. He looked to-day precisely as he had looked that evening, long ago, counting by weeks, when Captain Lennox called at the Hall. It might be that his face was a little thinner and more worn, but that was the only difference.

"So! You are the young jackanapes who wants to sketch my house—eh?" said Mr. Denison, as he peered into Conroy's face with eager, suspicious eyes. "How do I know that you are not a spy—a vile spy?" He ground out the last word from between his teeth and craned his long neck forward so as to bring it closer to Conroy's face.

"Do I look like a spy, sir?" asked Conroy calmly, as he went a pace nearer to the old man's chair.

"What have looks to do with it? There's many a false heart behind a fair-seeming face. Aye, many—many." He spoke the last words as if to himself, and when he had ended he sat staring out of the window like one who had become suddenly oblivious of everything around him. His lips moved, but no sound came from them.

Mr. Denison's reverie was broken by the entrance of Aaron with letters and newspapers. Then the squire turned to Conroy. "So,

you're not a spy, eh? Well, I don't think you look like one. And pray what can there be about a musty tumble-down old house, like this, that you should want to make a sketch of it?"

"The Denisons are one of the oldest families in Norfolk. Surely, sir, some account of the home of such a family would interest many people."

"And how come you to know so much about the Denisons?" shrewdly asked the squire. "But sit down. It worries me to see people standing at my elbow."

"Such knowledge is a part of my stock in trade," said Conroy, as he took a chair. "I have not only to make the sketches, but to tell the public all about them. Both in Burke and the 'County History' I have found many interesting particulars of the old family whose home is at Heron Dyke."

"Um—ah! And pray, young sir, what other houses in the county have you sketched before you found your way here?"

"None; I have come to you, sir, before going anywhere else."

"Well said, young man. The county can boast of finer houses by the score, but what are the families who live in them? Mushrooms. Mere mushrooms in comparison with the Denisons. We might have been ennobled centuries ago had we chosen to accept a title. But the Denisons always thought themselves above such gewgaws."

"Was it not to the same purport, sir, that Colonel Denison answered James the Second when his Majesty offered him a patent of nobility on the eve of the Battle of the Boyne?"

"Ah—ha! your reading has been to some purpose," said the old man, with a dry chuckle. "That's the colonel's portrait over there in the left-hand corner. They used to tell me that I was something like him when I was a young spark."

Evidently he was pleased. He rubbed his lean, chilly fingers together and fell into another reverie. Conroy glanced round. Ella was sitting at her little work-table busy with her crewels. What a sweet picture she made in the young man's eyes as she sat there in her grey dress, with the rich coils of her chestnut hair bound closely round her head, and an agate locket set in gold suspended from her neck by a ribbon, in which was a portrait of her dead mother. Not knowing that Conroy was gazing at her, her eyes glanced up from her work and encountered his. Next moment the long lashes hid them again, but the sweet carnation in her cheeks betrayed that she had been taken unawares.

Then Gilbert Denison spoke again. "There's something about you, young man," he said, "that seems to wake in my mind an echo of certain old memories which I thought were dead and buried for ever. Whether it's in your voice, or your eyes, or in the way you carry your head, or in all of them together, I don't know. Very likely what I mean exists only in my own imagination: I sometimes

think I'm getting into my dotage. What do you say your name is?" he asked, abruptly.

"Conroy, sir. Edward Conroy."

Mr. Denison shook his head. "I never knew any family of that name."

"The Conroys have been settled in North Devon for the last three hundred years."

"Never heard of 'em. But that's no matter. As I said before, there's something about you that comes home to me and I like, though I'll be hanged if I know what it is, and I've no doubt I'm an old simpleton for telling you as much. Anyhow, you may take what sketches of the place you like. You have my free permission for that. And if you're not above dining off boiled mutton—we are plain folk here now—you may find your way back to this room at five sharp, and there will be a knife and fork ready for you. Why not?"

The interview was over. Ella conducted Conroy into another room, and then rang the bell. "There must be some magic about you," she said, with a smile, "to have charmed my uncle as you have. You don't know what a rarity it is for him to see a fresh face at Heron Dyke."

Aaron Stone answered the bell. Ella gave Conroy into his charge, with instructions to show him all that there was to be seen, and to allow him to sketch whatever he might choose. The old man received this with a bad grace. He had become so thoroughly imbued with the fear of spies and what they might do, that no courtesy was left in him. Growling something under his breath about strangers on a Friday always bringing ill-luck, he limped away to fetch his bunch of keys.

"What a capital subject for an etching," thought Conroy, as he looked after the old man.

When five o'clock struck, Conroy shut up his sketch-book and retraced his way to Mr. Denison's room. The dinner was almost as homely as the host had divined that it would be. But if the viands were plain, the wine was super-excellent, and as Conroy could see that he was expected to praise it, he did not fail to do so. A basin of soup, followed by a little jelly and a glass of Madeira, formed Mr. Denison's dinner. His bodily weakness was evidently very great. It seemed to Conroy that the man was upheld and sustained more by his indomitable energy of will than by any physical strength he might be possessed of. "Heron Dyke will want a new master before long," was Conroy's unspoken thought, as he looked at the long-drawn, cadaverous face before him.

Ella would have left the room when the cloth was drawn, but her uncle bade her stay; for which Conroy thanked him inwardly. The young artist quickly found that if the evening were not to languish, perhaps end in failure, he must do the brunt of the talking himself. Mr. Denison was no great talker at the best of times, and Ella, from

some cause or another, was more reserved than usual; so Conroy plunged off at a tangent, and did his best to interest his hearers with an account of his experiences in Paris during the disastrous days of the Commune. As Desdemona of old was thrilled by the story of Othello's adventures, so was Ella thrilled this evening. Even Mr. Denison grew interested, and for once let his mind wander for a little while from his own interests and his own concerns.

As they sat thus, the September evening slowly darkened. The candles were never lighted till the last moment. Conroy sat facing the windows which opened into the private garden at the back of the Hall. The boundary of this garden was an ivy-covered wall about six feet high. A low-browed door in one corner gave access to the kitchen-garden, beyond which was the orchard, and last of all a wide stretch of park. There were flowers in the borders round the garden wall, but opposite the windows grew two large yews whose sombre foliage clouded much of the light that would otherwise have crept in through the diamond-paned windows, and made more gloomy still an apartment which, even on the brightest of summer days, never looked anything but cheerless and cold. On this overcast September eve the yew-trees outside blackened slowly and seemed to draw the darkness down from the sky. Aaron came in at last with candles, and while he was disposing them Conroy rose, crossed to one of the windows, and stood looking out into the garden. It was almost dark by this time. While looking thus, he suddenly saw the figure of a man emerge from behind one of the yews, stare intently into the room for a moment, and then vanish behind the other yew. Conroy was startled. Was there, then, really truth in the squire's assertion that spies were continually hovering round the Hall? Somehow he had deemed it nothing more than the hallucination of a sick man's fancy.

With what object could spies come to Heron Dyke? It was a mystery that puzzled Conroy. He crossed over to Ella and told her in a low voice what he had seen. She looked up with a startled expression in her eyes. "Don't say a word about it to my uncle," she whispered. "It would only worry him and could do no good. Both he and Aaron often assert that they see strange people lurking about the house; but I myself have never seen anyone."

The squire began to talk again, and nothing more passed. When Conroy rose to take his leave, his host held his hand and spoke to him cordially. "You will be in the neighbourhood for some days you tell us, Mr. Conroy. If you have nothing better to do on Tuesday than spend a few hours with a half-doited old man and a country lassie, try and find your way here again. Eh, now?"

This, nothing loth, Conroy promised to do; the more so as Ella's needle was suspended in mid-air for a moment while she waited to hear his answer. Conroy's eyes met hers for an instant as she gave him her hand at parting, but she was on her guard this time and nothing was to be read there.

He had not gone many steps from the house when there was a rustle amidst the trees he was passing; and a young and well-dressed man, so far as Mr. Conroy could see, who had been apparently peering through an opening in the trees, walked away quickly.

"He was watching the house," said Mr. Conroy to himself. "One of the spies, I suppose. What on earth is it they are spying at?"

Dull enough felt Ella after Conroy's departure. "I'll get a book," she said, shaking off her thoughts, which had turned on the man Conroy had seen behind the yew-tree: and she went to a distant room in search of one. Coming back with it, she saw the two housemaids, Martha and Ann, standing at the foot of the stairs which led up to the north wing. One of them held a candle, the other clung to her arm; both their faces were wearing an unmistakable look of terror.

"What is the matter?" she asked, going towards them.

"We've just heard something, Miss Ella," whispered Ann. "One of the bed-room doors up there has just shut with a loud bang."

"And it sounded like the door of *her* room," spoke the other from her pale and frightened lips. "Miss Ella, I am *sure* it was."

"The door of whose room?" asked Miss Winter sharply, her own heart leaping fast.

"Of Katherine's," answered both the maids together.

The leaping rose to Ella's throat now. "What business had you in this part of the house at all?" she questioned, after a pause.

"Mrs. Stone sent us after her spectacles," explained Ann. "She left them in your sitting-room, ma'am, when she was up there seeing to the curtains this afternoon. She sent us, Miss Ella; she'd not go up herself at dark for the world."

"Did she send both of you?" was the almost sarcastic question.

"Ma'am, she knows neither one of us would dare to go alone."

"You are a pair of silly, superstitious girls," rebuked Miss Winter. "What is there in the north wing to frighten you, more than in any other part of the house? I am surprised at you; at you, Ann, especially, knowing as I do how sensibly your mother brought you up."

"I can't help the feeling, miss, though I do strive against it," said Ann with a half sob. "I know it's wrong, but I can't help myself turning cold when I have to come into this part of the house after dark."

"We hear noises in the north wing as we don't hear elsewhere," said Martha, shivering. "Miss Ella, it is true—if anything ever was true in this world. It was the door of her room we heard just now—loud enough too. Just as if the wind had blown it to, or as if somebody had shut it in a temper."

"There is hardly enough wind this evening to stir a leaf," reproved their young mistress. "And you know that every door in the north wing is locked outside; except that of my sitting-room."

"No, Miss Ella there's not enough wind, and the doors is locked as you say; but we heard one of 'em bang, for all that, and it sounded like her door," answered Martha, with respectful persistency.

Ella looked at the young women. Could she cure them of this foolish fear, she asked herself—or, at least, soften it?

"Come with me, both of you," she said, taking the candle into her hand, and leading the way up the great oaken staircase. Clinging to each other, the servants followed. This, the north wing, was the oldest part of the house. Here and there a stair creaked beneath their footsteps; at every corner there were fantastic shadows that seemed to lie in wait and then spring suddenly out. The squeaking of a mouse and the pattering of light feet behind the wainscot made the girls start and tremble; but Ella held lightly on her way till the corridor that ran along the whole length of the upper floor of the wing was reached. Into this corridor some dozen rooms opened. Here Ella halted for a moment, and held the candle aloft.

"You shall see for yourselves that it could not be any of these doors you heard. We will examine them one by one."

One after another the doors were tried by Miss Winter. Each door was found to be locked, its key on the outside. When she reached Number Nine she drew in her breath and paused for a moment before turning the handle: perhaps she did not like that room more than the girls did. It was the room they had called "her room." But Number Nine was locked as the others were locked, and Ella passed on.

When all the doors had been tried Ella turned to the servants. "You see now that you must have been mistaken," she said, speaking very gravely; but in their own minds neither Martha nor Ann would have admitted anything of the kind.

Ella saw they were not satisfied. Leading the way back to Number Nine, she turned the key, opened the door, and went in. The two girls ventured no farther than the threshold. The room contained the ordinary adjuncts of a bed-chamber; and of one apparently in use. Across a chair hung a servant's muslin apron, on the chest of drawers lay a servant's cap, a linen collar, and a lavender neck ribbon. Simple articles all, yet the two housemaids shuddered when their eyes fell on them. In a little vase on the chimney-piece were a few withered flowers; violets and snowdrops. The oval looking-glass on the dressing-table was festooned with muslin, tied with bows of pink ribbon. But Ella, as she held the candle aloft and gazed round the room, saw something to-night that she had never noticed before. The bows of ribbon had been untied and the muslin drawn across the face of the glass so as completely to cover it.

Ella had been in the room some weeks ago, and she felt sure that the looking-glass was not covered then. It must have been done since; but by whom, and why? That none of the servants would enter the room of their own accord she knew quite well: yet whose

fingers, save those of a servant, could have done it? Despite her resolution to be calm, her heart chilled as she asked herself these questions, and her eyes wandered involuntarily to the bed, as though half expecting to see there the terrible outlines of a form that was still for ever. The same idea struck the two girls.

"Look at that glass!" cried the one to the other in a semi-whisper. "It is covered up as if there had been a death in the room."

Ella could bear no more. Motioning the servants from the room, she passed out herself and re-locked the door. But this time she took the key with her instead of leaving it in the lock.

"You see there is nothing to be afraid of," she said to the girls, as she gave them back the candle at the foot of the stairs. "Do not be so silly again."

But Ella Winter was herself more perplexed and shaken than she allowed to appear, or would have cared to admit.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE SNOWY NIGHT.

One of the last houses that you passed before you began to climb the hill into Nullington was the vicarage; a substantial red-brick building of the Georgian era, standing a little way back from the road in a paved fore-court, access to which was obtained through a quaintly-wrought iron gateway. At the back of the house was a charming terraced garden with an extensive view, some prominent features of which were the twisted chimneys of Heron Dyke, and the seven tall poplars that overshadowed the moat. Here dwelt the Rev. Francis Kettle, vicar of Nullington-cum-Easterby, and his daughter Maria. The living was not a very lucrative one, being only of the annual value of six hundred pounds; but the vicar was a man who, if his income has been two thousand a year, would have lived up to the full extent of it. He was fond of choice fruits, and generous wines, and French side dishes; while indoors he never did anything for himself that a servant could do for him. Out of doors he would potter about in his garden by the hour together. He was sixty years old, a portly, easy-going, round-voiced man, who read prayers admirably, but whose sermons hardly afforded an equal amount of satisfaction to the more critical members of his congregation. To rich and poor alike Mr. Kettle was bland, genial, and courteous. No one ever saw him out of temper. A moment's petulance was all that he would exhibit even when called from his warm fireside on a winter evening to go through the sloppy streets to pray by the bedside of some poor parishioner. No deserving case ever made a direct appeal to his pocket in vain, although the amount given might be trifling; but he was not a man who, even in his younger and more active days, had been in the habit of seeking out deserving

cases for himself. Before all things, Mr. Kettle loved his own ease: ease of body and ease of mind: it was constitutional with him to do so, and he could not help it. He knew that there was much sin and misery in the world, but he preferred not to see them; he chose rather to shut his eyes and walk on the other side of the way. Not seeing the sin and misery, there was no occasion for him to trouble his mind or pain his heart about them. But if, by chance, some heartrending case, some pathetic tale of human wretchedness, did persist in obtruding itself on his notice, and would not be kept out of sight, then would all the vicar's finer feelings be on edge for the remainder of that day. He would be restless and unhappy, and unable to settle down satisfactorily to his ordinary avocations. He would be as much hurt and put out of the way morally as he would have been hurt physically had he cut his finger. It was very thoughtless of people thus to disturb his equanimity and cause him such an amount of needless suffering. Next morning, however, the vicar would be his old, genial, easy-going self again, and human sin and wretchedness, and all the dark problems of life, would, so far as he was concerned, have discreetly vanished into the background.

Perhaps it was a fortunate thing for the vicar that he had a daughter —at least, such a daughter as Maria. Whatever shortcomings there might be on the father's part were more than compensated for on the daughter's. Maria Kettle was one of those women who cannot be happy unless they are striving and toiling for someone other than themselves. Her own individuality did not suffice for her: she lost herself in the wants and needs of others. No one knew the little weaknesses of her father's character better than herself, and no one could have striven more earnestly than she strove to cover them up from the eyes of the world. If he did not care to visit among the sick and necessitous of his flock, or to have his easy selfishness disturbed by listening to the story of their troubles, she made such amends as lay in her power. She did more, in fact, being a sympathetic and large-hearted woman, than it would have been possible for the vicar to have done, had his inclinations lain ever so much in that direction. In the back streets of Nullington, and among the alleys and courts where the labouring people herded together, no figure was better known than that of the vicar's daughter, with her homely features, her bright, speaking eyes, her dress of dark serge, her thick shoes, and her reticule. Little children who could scarcely talk were taught to lisp her name in their prayers, and the oldest of old people, as they basked outside their doors in the summer sunshine, blessed her, as she passed that way.

Early in the present year, the state of the vicar's health had caused alarm, and he was ordered to the South of France. Maria could not let him go alone, and for the time being the parish had to be abandoned to its fate, and to the ministrations of a temporary clergyman. Maria felt a prevision that she should find most things

turned upside down when they got back to it—which proved to be the case. She and her father, the latter in good health, had now returned, and on the day following their arrival, Ella, all eagerness to see them, set off to walk to the vicarage. She and Maria were close and dear friends.

That she should be required to tell all about everything that had transpired since their absence, Ella knew; it was only natural. More especially about that one sad, dark, and most unexplainable event which had taken place at the Hall in February last. She already shrank from the task in anticipation; for, in truth, it had shaken her terribly, and a haunting dread lay ever on her mind.

About midway between Heron Dyke and the vicarage, lying a little back from the road was a small inn, its sign a somewhat curious one, the "Leaning Gate." Its landlord, John Keen, had died in it many years ago: since which time it had been kept by his widow, a very respectable and hard-working woman, who made her guests comfortable in a homely way and who possessed the good-will of all the neighbours around. She had two daughters, Susan and Katherine; who were brought up industriously by the mother, and were both nice-looking, modest, and good girls. Susan was somewhat dull of intellect. Katherine was rather a superior girl in intelligence and manners, and very clever with her needle; she had been the favourite pupil in Miss Kettle's school, and later had helped to teach in it. Maria esteemed her greatly: and about fourteen months prior to the present time, when Miss Winter was wanting a maid, Maria said she could not do better than take Katherine. So Katherine Keen removed to the Hall, greatly to her mother's satisfaction, for she thought it a good opening for the young girl; but not so much to the satisfaction of Susan.

The sisters were greatly attached to one another. Susan especially loved Katherine. It is sometimes noticeable that where the intellect is not bright, the feelings are strong; and with an almost unreasonable, passionate tenderness Susan Keen loved her sister. Katherine's removal to Heron Dyke tried her. She could hardly exist without seeing her daily; and she would put her cloak on when the day's work was done—for Susan assisted her mother in the inn—and run up to the Hall to see Katherine. But Katherine and Mrs. Keen both told her she must not do this: her going so frequently might not be liked at the Hall, especially by ill-tempered Aaron Stone and his wife. Thus admonished, Susan put a restraint upon herself, so as not to trouble anybody too often; but many an evening she would steal up at dusk, walk round the Hall, and stand outside watching the windows, hoping to get just one distant glimpse of her beloved Katherine.

The time went on to February in the present year, Katherine giving every satisfaction at Heron Dyke: even old Aaron would now and then afford her a good word. And it should be mentioned that

the girl had made no fresh acquaintance; either of man or woman —she was thoroughly well-conducted in every way.

Miss Winter's own sitting-room and her bed-room were in the north wing. She had chosen them there on account of the beautiful view of the sea from the windows. Katherine slept in a room near her. On the evening of the fifteenth of February they were both in the sitting-room at work; Ella was making garments for some poor children in the village and had called Katherine to assist. Katherine had a headache; it got worse; and at nine o'clock, Ella told her she had better go to bed. The girl thanked her, lighted her candle and went; Ella, who went at the same time to her own room to get something she wanted, saw her enter her chamber and heard her lock herself in: and from that moment, Katherine Keen was never seen, alive or dead. Before the night was over, Ella—as you will hear her tell presently—had occasion to go to Katherine's room; she found the door unlocked, and Katherine absent, the bed not having been slept in. Her apron, cap, collar, and neck-ribbon lay about, showing that she had begun to undress; but that was all. Of herself there was no trace; there never had been any since that night.

That she had not left the house was a matter of absolute fact, for old Aaron had already fastened the front door, and there could be no egress from it. In short it was a strange mystery, and puzzled the world. Where was she? What could have become of her? The matter caused no end of stir and commotion. Old Squire Denison, very much troubled at the extraordinary occurrence, instituted all kinds of enquiries, but to no purpose. Every nook and corner in the spacious house was searched again and again. Aaron Stone, cross enough with the girl often-times beforehand, seemed troubled with the rest; his wife declared openly, her eyes round with terror, that the girl must have been "spirited" away. The grandson, Hubert, was away at the time, and knew absolutely nothing whatever of the occurrence.

But the sister, Susan, had a tale to tell, and it was a curious one. It appeared that that same morning she had met Katherine in the village, doing an errand for Miss Winter. Susan told her that a letter had come from their brother—a young man older than themselves, who had gone some years before to an uncle in Australia—and that she would bring it to the Hall that evening. However, when evening came, snow began to fall, and Mrs. Keen would not let Susan go out in it, for she had a cold. Presently the snow ceased, and Susan, wrapping her cloak about her, started with the letter. As she neared the Hall the clock struck nine—too late for Susan to attempt to call, for after that hour her visits were interdicted. She hovered about a short while, lest haply she might see one of the housemaids hastening home from some errand, and could send in the letter by her, or perhaps catch a glimpse of her darling sister at her window. The sky was clear then, the moon shining brilliantly

on the snowy ground. As Susan stood there, a light appeared in Katherine's room. She fancied she saw the curtain pulled momentarily aside, but she saw no more. While thus watching, Susan was startled by a cry, or scream of terror; two screams, the last very faint, but following close upon the other. They appeared to come from inside the house, Susan thought inside the room, and were in her sister's voice—of that, Susan felt an absolute certainty. A little thing served to terrify her. She took to her heels, and burst into her mother's kitchen in a pitiable state. The mother, and two or three people sitting in the inn, took it for granted that the cry must have been that of some night-bird; and the terrified girl was got to bed.

With the morning news was brought to the inn of Katherine's strange disappearance; and, as already said, she had never been heard of from that day. Nothing could shake Susan's belief that it was her sister's screams; she declared she knew her voice too well to be mistaken. The event had a sad effect upon her mind: at times she really seemed but half-witted. She could not be persuaded but that Katherine was still in the house at Heron Dyke; and as often as she could escape her mother's vigilance would steal up in the dark and hover about outside, looking at the windows for Katherine: nay, more than once believing that she saw her appear at one of them.

Such was the occurrence that had served to shake Miss Winter's nerves, and that she was on her way now to the vicarage to be (as she well knew) cross-questioned about.

Mr. Kettle met her with a fatherly kiss; telling her she looked bonnier than ever and that there was nothing like an English rosebud. Maria clasped her in her arms. Ella took her bonnet off and sat down with them in the bow-windowed parlour open to the summer breeze: and for some time it was hard to say which of the three talked the fastest. The vicar began, as a matter of course, about the shortcomings in the parish during his absence, especially about the churchwardens' difficulties with Pennithorne—the temporary parson. That gentleman had persisted in having two big candlesticks on the altar where no such articles had ever been seen before, and had attempted to establish a daily service, which had proved to be an ignominious failure, together with other changes and innovations that were more open to objection. Ella confirmed it all, and the vicar worked himself into a fume.

"Confound the fellow!" he exclaimed, "I'd never have gone away had I known. Who was to suspect that meek-looking young jackanapes, with his gold-rimmed spectacles, had so much mischief in him. He looked as mild as new milk.——And now, my dear, what about that strange affair concerning Katherine Keen?" resumed the vicar, after a pause. "Your letter to us, describing it, was hardly —hardly credible."

"And it was—and is—hardly credible," replied Ella.

"Well, child, just go over it now quietly."

The light died out of Ella's eyes, and her face saddened. But she complied with the request; not dwelling very minutely upon the particulars. The vicar and Maria listened to her in silence.

"It is the most unaccountable thing I ever heard of," cried the vicar impulsively when it was over. "Locked up in her room and disappeared! Is there a trap-door in the floor?"

Ella shook her head sadly. "The waxed boards of the room are all sound and firm."

"And she could not have come out of her room and got out of the house, you say?"

"No. It was not possible. She had a bad headache, as I tell you, and I told her she had better go to bed; that was about nine o'clock. While she was folding up the child's petticoat she had been sewing at, Aaron came into the room to say that Uncle Gilbert was asking for me. Katherine lighted both the bed candles, which were on a tray outside, and we left the room together. I ran into my own room and caught up my prayer-book, for sometimes my uncle lets me read the evening psalms to him. Katherine was going into her room as I ran out; she wished me good-night, went in, and locked it."

"Locked it!" exclaimed the vicar. "A bad habit to sleep with the door locked. Suppose a fire broke out!"

"I used to tell her so; but she said she could not feel safe with it unlocked. She and Susan were once frightened in the night when they were little girls, and had locked their door ever since. I went on down to Uncle Gilbert," continued Ella. "Aaron was then bolting and barring the house-door—and, considering that he always carries away the key in his own pocket, you will readily see that poor Katherine had no chance of getting out by it."

"There was the back door," said the vicar: who, to use his own words, could not see daylight in this story. "Your great entrance door is, I know, kept barred and locked always."

"Yes. Aaron went straight to the back door from the front, fastened up that, and in like manner carried away the key. Believe me, dear Mr. Kettle, there was no *chance* that Katherine could go out of the house. And why should she wish to do so?"

"Well, go on, child. You found the room empty yourself in the middle of the night—was it not so?"

"Yes—and that was a strange thing; very strange," replied Ella, musingly. "I went to bed as usual, and slept well; but at four o'clock in the morning I was suddenly awakened by hearing, as I thought, Uncle Gilbert calling me. I awoke in a *fright*, you must understand, and I don't know why: I have thought since that I must have had some disagreeable dream, though I did not remember it. I sat up in bed to listen, not really knowing whether Uncle Gilbert had called me, or whether I had only dreamt it ——"

"You could not hear your uncle calling all the way up in the north wing, Ella," interrupted Miss Kettle.

"No; and I knew, if he had called, that he must have left his room and come to the stairs. I heard no more, but I was uneasy, and felt that I ought to go and see. I put on my slippers and my warm dressing-gown, and lighted my candle; but—you will forgive me my foolishness, I hope—I felt too nervous to go down alone; though again I say I knew not why I should feel so; and I thought I would call Katherine to go with me. I opened her door and entered, not remembering until afterwards that I ought to have found it locked. The first thing I saw was her candle burnt down to the socket, its last sparks were just flickering, and that the bed had not been slept in. Katherine's apron and cap were lying there, but she was gone."

"It is most strange," cried Mr. Kettle.

"It is more than strange," returned Ella, with a half sob.

"And, my dear, had your uncle called you?"

"No. He had had a good night, and was sleeping still."

"Well, I can't make it out. Was Katherine in bad spirits that last evening?"

"Not at all. Her head pained her, but she was merry enough. I remember her laughing early in the evening. She drew aside the curtain by my direction to see what sort of a night it was, and exclaimed that it was snowing. Then she laughed and said how poor Susan would be disappointed, for her mother would be sure not to let her come up through the snow. Susan was to have brought up a letter they had received from the brother."

"And what is the tale about Susan coming up when the snow was over, and hearing screams? Did you hear them in the house?"

"No. None of us heard anything of the kind."

"But if, as I am told Susan says, it was her sister who screamed in the room, some of you must have heard it."

"I am not so sure of that," replied Ella. "Uncle Gilbert's sitting-room—I had gone down to him then—is very remote from the north wing; and so are the shut-in kitchen apartments. Aaron ought to have heard down in the hall; but he says he did not."

"Then, in point of fact, nobody heard these cries but Susan?"

"Yes; Tom, the coachman's boy, heard them. Tom had been out of doors doing something for his father, and was close to the stables, going in again, when he heard two screams, the last one much fainter than the other. Tom says the cries had a sort of muffled sound, and, for that reason, he thought they were inside the house. So far, poor Susan's account is borne out."

"And the house doors were found still fastened in the morning?"

"Bolted and barred and locked as usual, when old Aaron undid them. More snow had fallen in the night, covering the ground well. Katherine has never been heard of in any way since."

Mr. Kettle sat revolving the tale. It was quite beyond his compre-

hension. "In point of fact, the girl disappeared," he said presently, "I can make nothing more of it than that."

"That is the precise word for it—disappeared," assented Ella, in a low tone. "And so unaccountably that it seems just as if she had vanished into air. The feeling of discomfort it has left amongst us in Heron Dyke can never be described."

"Do you still sleep in the north wing?" asked Maria, the thought occurring to her.

"Oh no. I changed my room after that."

Ella had told all she had to tell. But the theme was full of interest, and the vicar and Maria plied her with questions all through luncheon, to which meal they made her stay. She left when it was over; her uncle might want her; and Maria put on her bonnet to walk with her a portion of the way. Their road took them past the "Leaning Gate."

Mrs. Keen was having the sign repainted—a swinging gate that hung aloft beside the inn. A girl, the one young servant kept, stood with her arms a-kimbo, looking up at the process. The landlady was a short, active, bustling woman, with a kind, motherly face and pleasant dark eyes.

"How do you do, Mrs. Keen?" called out Maria, as they were passing.

Mrs. Keen came running up, and took the offered hand into both of hers. "I heard you were back, Miss Maria, and glad enough we shall be of it. But—but—"

She could not go on. The remembrance of what had happened overcame her, and she burst into tears.

"Yes, young ladies, I know your kind sympathy, and I hope you'll forgive me," she said, after listening to the few words of consolation they both strove to speak—though, indeed, what consolation could there be for such a case as hers?

"We had been gone away so short a time when it happened!" lamented Maria.

"You left on the first of February, Miss Maria, and this was on the night of the fifteenth," said Mrs. Keen, wiping her eyes with her ample white apron. "Ah, it has been a dreadful thing! It is the uncertainty, the suspense, you see, ladies, that is so bad to bear. Sometimes I think I should be happy if I could only know she was dead and at rest."

"How is Susan?" asked Maria.

"Susan's getting almost silly with it," spoke the landlady lowering her voice, as she glanced over her shoulder at the house. "She has all sorts of wild fancies in her head, poor girl; thinking—thinking—"

Mrs. Keen glanced at Miss Winter, and broke off. The words she had been about to say were these: "Thinking that Katherine, dead or alive, is still at Heron Dyke."

(*To be continued.*)

VERENA FONTAINE'S REBELLION.

STRIDING along through South Crabb, and so on down by old Massock's brick fields, went Sir Dace Fontaine, dark and gloomy. His heavy stick and his heavy tread kept pace together; both might have been the better for a little lightness.

Matters were not going on too smoothly at Maythorn Bank. Seemingly obedient to her father, Verena Fontaine contrived to meet her lover, and did not take extraordinary pains to keep it secret. Sir Dace, watching stealthily, found it out, and felt just about at his wits' end.

He had no power to banish Edward Pym from the place: he had none, one must conclude, to exact submission from Verena. She had observed to me, the first night we met, that American girls grow up to be independent of control in many ways. That is true: and, as it seems to me, they think great guns of themselves for being so.

Sir Dace was beginning to turn his anger on Colonel Letsom. As chance had it, while he strode along this morning, full of wrath, the Colonel came in view, turning the corner of the strongest and most savoury brick-yard.

"Why do you harbour that fellow?" broke out Sir Dace, fiercely, without circumlocution of greeting.

"What, young Pym?" cried the little Colonel in his mild way, jumping to the other's meaning. "I don't suppose he will stay with us long. He is expecting a summons to join his ship."

"But why do you have him at your house at all?" reiterated Sir Dace, with a thump of his stick. "Why did you take him in?"

"Well, you see, he came down, a stranger, and presented himself to us, calling my wife Aunt, though she is not really so, and said he would like to stay a few days with us. We could not turn him away, Sir Dace. In fact we had no objection to his staying; he behaves himself very well. He'll not be here long."

"He has been here a great deal too long," growled Sir Dace; and went on his way muttering.

Nothing came of this complaint of Sir Dace Fontaine's. Edward Pym continued to stay at Crabb, Colonel Letsom not seeing his way clear to send him adrift; perhaps not wanting to. The love-making went on. In the green meadows, where the grass and the sweet wild flowers were springing up, in the ravine, between its sheltering banks, redolent of romance; or in the triangle, treading under-foot the late primroses and violets—in one or other of these retreats might Mr. Pym and his ladye-love be seen together, listening to the tender vows whispered between them, and to the birds' songs.

Sir Dace, conscious of all this, grew furious, and matters came to a climax. Verena was bold enough to steal out one night to meet Pym for a promenade with him in the moonlight, and Sir Dace came upon them sitting on the stile at the end of the cross lane. He gave it Pym hot and strong, marched Verena home, and the next day carried both his daughters away from Crabb.

But I ought to mention that I had gone away from Crabb myself before this, and was in London with Miss Deveen. So that what had been happening lately I only knew by hearsay.

To what part of the world Sir Dace went, was not known. Naturally Crabb was curious upon the point. Just as naturally it was supposed that Pym, having nothing to stay for, would now take his departure. Pym, however, stayed on.

One morning Mr. Pym called at Maythorn Bank. An elderly woman, one Betty Huntsman, who had been employed by the Fontaines as cook, opened the door to him. The coloured man, Ozias, and a maid, Esther, had gone away with the family. It was the second time Mr. Pym had presented himself upon the same errand: to get the address of Sir Dace Fontaine. Betty, obeying her master's orders, had refused it; this time he had come to bribe her. Old Betty, however, an honest, kindly old woman, refused to be bribed.

"I can't do it, sir," she said to Pym. "When the master wrote to give me the address, on account of sending him his foreign letters, he forbade me to disclose it to anybody down here. It is only myself that knows it, sir."

"It is in London; I know that much," affirmed Pym, making a shot at the place, and so far taking in old Betty.

"That much may possibly be known, sir. I cannot tell more."

Back went Pym to Colonel Letsom's. He sat down and wrote a letter in a young lady's hand—for he had all kinds of writing at his fingers' ends—and addressed it to Mrs. Betty Huntsman at Maythorn Bank, Worcestershire. This he enclosed in a bigger envelope, with a few lines from himself, and posted it to London, to one Alfred Saxby, a sailor friend of his. He next, in a careless, off-hand manner, asked Colonel Letsom if he'd mind calling at Maythorn Bank, and asking the old cook there if she could give him her master's address. Oh, Pym was as cunning as a fox, and could lay out his plans artfully. And Colonel Letsom, unsuspicious as the day, and willing to oblige everybody, did call that afternoon to put the question to Betty: but she told him she was not at liberty to give the address.

The following morning, Pym got the summons he had been expecting, to join his ship. The *Rose of Delhi* was now ready to take in cargo. After swearing a little, down sat Mr. Pym to his desk, and in a shaky hand, to imitate a sick man's, wrote back word that he was ill in bed, but would endeavour to be up in London on the morrow.

And, the morning following this, Mrs. Betty Huntsman got a letter from London.

"London, Thursday.

"DEAR OLD BETTY,—I am writing to you for papa, who is very poorly indeed. Should Colonel Letsom apply to you for our address here, you are to give it him: papa wishes him to have it. We hope your wrist is better.

"CORALIE FONTAINE."

Betty Huntsman, honest herself, never supposed but the letter was written by Miss Fontaine. By and by, there came a ring at the bell.

"My uncle, Colonel Letsom, requested me to call here this morning, as I was passing on my way to Timberdale Rectory," began Mr. Pym; for it was he who rang, and by his authoritative voice and lordly manner, one might have thought he was on board a royal frigate, commanding a cargo of refractory soldiers.

"Yes, sir?" answered Betty, dropping a curtsey.

"Colonel Letsom wants your master's address in London—if you can give it him. He has to write to Sir Dace to-day."

Betty produced a card from her innermost pocket, and showed it to Mr. Pym: who carefully copied down the address.

That he was on his way to Timberdale Rectory, was *not* a ruse. He went on there through the ravine at the top of his speed, and asked for Captain Tanerton.

"Have got orders to join ship, sir, and am going up this morning. Any commands?"

"To join what ship?" questioned Jack.

"The *Rose of Delhi*. She is beginning to load."

Jack paused. "Of course you must go up, as you are sent for. But I don't think you will go out in the *Rose of Delhi*, Mr. Pym. I should recommend you to look out for another ship."

"Time enough for that, Captain Tanerton, when I get my discharge from the *Rose of Delhi*: I have not got it yet," returned Pym, who seemed to take a private delight in thwarting his captain.

"Well, I shall be in London myself shortly, and will see about things," spoke Jack.

"Any commands, sir?"

"Not at present."

Taking his leave of Colonel and Mrs. Letsom, and thanking them for their hospitality, Edward Pym departed for London by an afternoon train. He left his promises and vows to the young Letsoms, boys and girls, to come down again at the close of the next voyage, little dreaming, poor ill-fated young man, that he would never go upon another. Captain Tanerton wrote at once to head quarters in Liverpool, saying he did not wish to retain Pym as chief mate, and would like another one to be appointed. Strolling back to Timberdale Rectory from posting the letter at Salmon's, John Tanerton fell into a brown study.

A curious feeling, against taking Pym out again, lay within him; like an instinct, it seemed; a prevision of warning. Jack was fully conscious of it, though he knew not why it should be there. It was a great deal stronger than could have been prompted by his disapprobation of the man's carelessness in his duties on board.

"I'll go up to London to-morrow," he decided. "Best to do so. Pym means to sail in the *Rose of Delhi* if he can; just, I expect, because he sees I don't wish him to: the man's nature is as contrary as two sticks. I'll not have him again at any price. Yes, I must go up to-morrow."

"L'homme propose"—we know the proverb. Very much to Jack's surprise, his wife arrived that evening at the Rectory from Liverpool, with her eldest child, Polly. Therefore, Jack did not start for London on the morrow; it would not have been at all polite.

He went up the following week. His first visit was to Eastcheap, in which bustling quarter stood the office of Mr. James Freeman, the ship's broker. After talking a bit about the ship and her cargo, Jack spoke of Pym.

"Has a first officer been appointed in Pym's place?"

"No," said Mr. Freeman. "Pym goes out with you again."

"I told you I did not wish to take Pym again," cried Jack.

"You said something about it, I know, and we thought of putting in the mate from the *Star of Lahore;* but he wants to keep to his own vessel."

"I won't take Pym."

"But why, Captain Tanerton?"

"We don't get on together. I never had an officer who gave me so much provocation—the Americans would say, who *riled* me so. I believe the man dislikes me, and for that reason was insubordinate. He may do better in another ship. I am a strict disciplinarian on board."

"Well," carelessly observed the broker, "you will have to make the best of him this voyage, Captain Tanerton. It is decided that he sails with you again."

"Then, don't be surprised if there's murder committed," was Jack's impetuous answer.

And Mr. Freeman stared: and noted the words.

The midday sun was shining hotly upon the London pavement, and especially upon the glittering gold band adorning the cap of a lithe, handsome young sailor, who had just got out of a cab, and was striding along as though he wanted to run a race with the clocks. It was Edward Pym: and the reader will please take notice that we have gone back a few days, for this was the day following Pym's arrival in London.

"Halt a step," cried he to himself, his eye catching the name written up at a street corner. "I must be out of my bearings."

Taking from his pocket a piece of paper, he read some words written there. It was no other than the address he had got from Betty Huntsman the previous day.

"Woburn Place, Russell Square," repeated he. "This is not it. I'll be shot if I know where I am!—Can you tell me my way to Woburn Place?" asked he, of a gentleman who was passing.

"Turn to the left; you will soon come to it."

"Thank you," said Pym.

The right house sighted at last, Mr. Pym took his standing in a friendly door-way on the other side the road, and put himself on the watch. Very much after the fashion of a bailiff's man, who wants to serve a writ.

He glanced up at the windows; he looked down at the doors; he listened to the sound of a church clock striking; he scraped his feet in impatience, now one foot, now the other. Nothing came of it. The rooms behind the curtained windows might be untenanted for all the sign given out to the eager eyes of Mr. Pym.

"Hang it all!" he cried, in an explosion of impatience: and he could have sent the silent dwelling to Jericho.

No man of business likes his time to be wasted: and Mr. Pym could very especially not afford to waste his to-day. For he was supposed to be at St. Katherine's Docks, checking cargo on board the *Rose of Delhi*. When twelve o'clock struck, the dinner hour, he had made a rush from the ship, telling the foreman of the shed not to ship any more cargo till he came back in half an hour, and had come dashing up here in a fleet cab. The half hour had expired, and another half hour to it, and it was a great deal more than time to dash back again. If anybody from the office chanced to go down to the ship, what a row there'd be!—and he would probably get his discharge.

He had not been lucky in his journey from Worcestershire the previous day. The train was detained so on the line, through some heavy waggons having come to grief, that he did not reach London till late at night; too late to go down to his lodgings near the docks; so he slept at an hotel. This morning he had reported himself at the broker's office; and Mr. Freeman, after blowing him up for his delay, ordered him on board at once: since they began to load, two days ago now, a clerk from the office had been down on the ship, making up the cargo-books in Pym's place.

"I'll be hanged if I don't believe they must all be dead!" cried Pym, gazing at the house. "Why does not somebody show himself. I can't post the letter—for I know my letters to her are being suppressed. And I dare not leave it at the door myself, lest that cantankerous Ozias should answer me, and hand it to old Dace, instead of to Vera."

Luck at last! The door opened, and a maid servant came out

with a jug, her bonnet thrown on perpendicularly. Mr. Pym kept her in view, and caught her up as she was nearing a public house.

"You come from Mrs. Ball's, Woburn Place?" said he.

"Yes, sir," answered the girl, doubtfully, rather taken aback at the summary address, but capitulating to the gold-lace band.

"I want you to give this letter privately to Miss Verena Fontaine. When she is quite alone, you understand. And here's half-a-crown, my pretty lass, for your trouble."

The girl touched neither letter nor money. She surreptitiously put her bonnet straight, in her gratified vanity.

"But I can't give it, sir," she said. "Though I'm sure I'd be happy to oblige you if I could. The Miss Fontaines and their papa is not with us now; they've gone away."

"What?" cried Pym, setting his teeth angrily, an expression crossing his face that marred all its good looks. "When did they leave? Where are they gone to?"

"They left yesterday, sir, and they didn't say where. That black servant of theirs and our cook couldn't agree; there was squabbles perpetual. None of us liked him: it don't seem Christian-like to have a black man sitting down to table with you. Mrs. Ball, our missis, she took our part; and the young ladies and their papa they naturally took *his* part: and so, they left."

"Can I see Mrs. Ball?" asked Pym, after mentally anathematising servants in general, black and white. "Is she at home?"

"Yes, sir, and she'll see you, I'm sure. She is vexed at their having left."

He dropped the half-crown into the girl's hand, returned the note to his pocket, and went to the house. Mrs. Ball, a talkative, good-humoured woman in a rusty black silk gown, with red cheeks and quick brown eyes, opened the door to him herself.

She invited him in. She would have given him Sir Dace Fontaine's address with all the pleasure in life, if she had it, she said. Sir Dace did not leave it with her. He simply bade her take in any letters that might come, and he would send for them.

"Have you not any notion where they went?—to what part of the town?" asked the discomfited Pym. That little trick he had played Betty Huntsman was of no use to him now.

"Not any. Truth to say, I was too vexed to ask," confessed Mrs. Ball. "I knew nothing about their intention to leave until they were packing up. Sir Dace paid me a week's rent in lieu of warning, and away they went in two cabs. You are related to them, sir? There's a look in your face that Sir Dace has got."

Mr. Pym knitted his brow; he did not take it as a compliment. Many people had seen the same likeness; though he was a handsome young man and Sir Dace an ugly old one.

"If you can get their address, I shall be much obliged to you to keep it for me; I will call again to-morrow evening," were his parting

words to the landlady. And he went rattling back to the docks as fast as wheels could take him.

Mr. Pym went up to Woburn Place the following evening accordingly, but the landlady had no news to give him. He went the next evening after, and the next, and the next. All the same. He went so long and to so little purpose that he at last concluded the Fontaines were not in London. Sir Dace neither sent a messenger nor wrote for any letters there might be. Two were waiting for him; no more. Edward Pym and Mrs. Ball became, so to say, quite intimate. She had much sympathy with the poor young man, who wanted to find his relatives before he sailed—and could not.

It may as well be told, not to make an unnecessary mystery of it, that the Fontaines had gone straight to Brighton. At length, however, Mrs. Ball was one day surprised by a visit from Ozias. She never bore malice long, and received him civilly. Her rooms were let again, so she had got over the smart.

"At Brighton!" she exclaimed, when she heard where they had been—for the man had no orders to conceal it. "I thought it strange that your master did not send for his letters. And how are the young ladies? And where are you staying now?"

"The young ladies, they well," answered Ozias. "We stay now at one big house in Marylebone Road. We come up yesterday to this London town: Sir Dace, he find the sea no longer do for him; make him have much bile."

Edward Pym had been in a rage at not finding Verena. Verena, on her part, though rather wondering that she did not hear from him, looked upon his silence as only a matter of precaution. When they were settled at Woburn Place, after leaving Crabb, she had written to Pym, enjoining him not to reply. It might not be safe, she said, for Coralie had gone over to "the enemy," meaning Sir Dace: Edward must contrive to see her when he came to London to join his ship. And when the days went on, and Verena saw nothing of her lover, she supposed he was not yet in London. She went to Brighton supposing the same. But, now that they were back from Brighton, and still neither saw Pym nor heard from him, Verena grew uneasy, fearing that the *Rose of Delhi* had sailed.

"What a strange thing it is about Edward!" she exclaimed one evening to her sister. "I think he must have sailed. He would be sure to come to us if he were in London."

"How should he know where we are?" dissented Coralie. "For all he can tell, Vera, we may be in the moon."

A look of triumph crossed Vera's face. "He knows the address in Woburn Place, Coral, for I wrote and gave it him: and Mrs. Ball would direct him here. Papa sent Ozias there to-day for his letters; and I know Edward would never cease going there, day by day, to ask for news, until he heard of me."

Coralie laughed softly. Unlocking her writing-case, she displayed

a letter that lay snugly between its leaves. It was the one that Vera had written at Woburn Place. Verena turned very angry, but Coralie made light of it.

"As I daresay he has already sailed, I confess my treachery, Vera. It was all done for your good. Better think no more of Edward Pym."

"You wicked thing! You are more cruel than Bluebeard. I shall take means to ascertain whether the *Rose of Delhi* is gone. Captain Tanerton made a boast that he'd not take Edward out again, but he may not have been able to help himself," pursued Vera, her tone significant. "Edward *intended to go in her*, and he has a friend at court."

"A friend at court!" repeated Coralie. "What do you mean? Who is it?"

"It is the Freemans' out-door manager at Liverpool, and the ship's husband—a Mr. Gould. He came up here when the ship got in, and he and Edward made friends together. The more readily because Gould and Captain Tanerton are not friends. The Captain complained to the owners last time of something or other connected with the ship—some bad provisions, I think, that had been put on board, and insisted on its being rectified. As Mr. Gould was responsible, he naturally resented this, and ever since he has been fit to hang Captain Tanerton."

"How do you know all this, Verena?"

"From Edward. He told me at Crabb. Mr. Gould has a great deal more to do with choosing the officers than the Freemans themselves have, and he promised Edward he should remain in the *Rose of Delhi*."

"It is strange Edward should care to remain in the ship when her commander does not like him," remarked Coralie.

"He stays in because of that—to thwart Tanerton," laughed Verena lightly. "Partly, at least. But he thinks, you see, and I think, that his remaining for two voyages in a ship that has so good a name may tell well for him with papa. Now you know, Coral."

II.

THE lovers met. Pym found her out through Mrs. Ball. And Verena, thoroughly independent in her notions, put on her bonnet, and walked with him up and down the Marylebone Road.

"We sail this day week, Vera," he said. "My life has been a torment to me, fearing I should not see you before the ship went out of dock. And, in that case, I don't think I should have gone in her."

"Is it the *Rose of Delhi?*" asked Vera.

"Of course. I told you Gould would manage it. She is first-rate in every way, and the most comfortable ship I ever was in—barring the skipper."

"You don't like him, I know. And he does not like you."

"I hate and detest him," said Pym warmly—therefore, as the reader must perceive, no love was lost between him and Jack. "He is an awful screw for keeping one to one's duty, and I expect we shall have no end of squalls. Ah, Verena," continued the young man, in a changed tone, "had you only listened to my prayers at Crabb, I need not have sailed again at all."

Mr. Edward Pym was a bold wooer. He had urged Verena to cut the matter short by marrying him at once. She stopped his words.

"I will marry you in twelve months from this, if all goes well, but not before. It is waste of time to speak of it, Edward—as I have told you. Were I to marry without papa's consent—and you know he will not give it—he can take most of the money that came to me from mamma. Only a small income would remain to me. I shall not risk *that*."

"As if Sir Dace would exact it! He might go into one of his passions at first, but he'd soon come round; he'd not touch your money, Vera." And Edward Pym, in saying this, fully believed it.

"You don't know papa. I have been used to luxuries, Edward, and I could not do without them. What would two hundred pounds a year be for me—living as I have lived? And for you, also, for you would be my husband? Next May I shall be of age, and my fortune will be safe—all my own."

"A thousand things may happen in a year," grumbled Pym, who was wild to lead an idle life, and hated the discipline on board ship. "The *Rose of Delhi* may go down, and I with it."

"She has not gone down yet. Why should she go down now?"

"What right had Coralie to intercept your letter?" asked Pym, passing to another phase of his grievances.

"She had no right; but she did it. I asked Esther, our own maid, to run and put it in the post for me. Coralie, coming in from walking, met Esther at the door, saw the letter in her hand, and took it from her, saying she would go back and post it herself. Perhaps Esther suspected something: she did not tell me this. Coralie had the face to tell it me herself yesterday."

"Well, Vera, you should have managed better," returned Pym, feeling frightfully cross.

"Oh, Edward, don't you see how it is?" wailed the girl, in a piteous tone of appeal—"that they are all against me. Or, rather, against you. Papa, Coralie, and Ozias: and I fancy now that Coralie has spoken to Esther. Papa makes them think as he thinks."

"It is a fearful shame. Is this to be our only interview?"

"No," said Vera. "I will see you every day until you sail."

"You may not be able to. We shall be watched, now Coralie has turned against us."

"I will see you every day until you sail," repeated the girl, with impassioned fervour. "Come what may, I will contrive to see you."

In making this promise, Miss Verena Fontaine probably did not understand the exigencies on a chief mate's time when a ship is getting ready for sea. To rush up from the docks at the midday hour, and rush back again in time for work, was not practicable. Pym had done it once; he could not do it twice. Therefore, the only time to be seized upon was after six o'clock, when the *Rose of Delhi* was left to herself and her watchman for the night, and the dock gates were shut. This brought it, you see, to about seven o'clock, before Pym could be hovering, like a wandering ghost, up and down the Marylebone Road; for he had to go to his lodgings in Ship Street first and put himself to rights after his day's work, to say nothing of drinking his tea. And seven o'clock was Miss Verena Fontaine's dinner hour. Sir Dace Fontaine's mode of dining was elaborate; and, what with the side-dishes, the puddings and the dessert, it was never over much before nine o'clock.

For two days Verena made her dinner at luncheon. Late dining did not agree with her, she told Coralie, and she should prefer some tea in her room. Coralie watched, and saw her come stealing in each night soon after nine. Until that hour, she had promenaded with Edward Pym in the bustling lighted streets, or in the quieter walks of the Regent's Park. On the third day, Sir Dace told her that she must be in her place at the dinner-table. Verena wondered whether the order emanated from his arbitrary temper, or whether he had any suspicion. So, that evening she dined as usual; and when she and Coralie went into the drawing-room at eight o'clock, she said her head ached, and she should go to bed.

That night there was an explosion. Docked of an hour at the beginning of their interview, the two lovers made out for it by lingering together an hour longer at the end of it. It was striking ten when Verena came in, and found herself confronted by her father. Verena gave Coralie the credit of betraying her, but in that she was wrong. Sir Dace—he might have had his suspicions—suddenly called for a particular duet that was a favourite with his daughters, bade Coralie look it out, and sent up for Verena to come down and sing it. Miss Verena was not to be found, so could not obey.

Sir Dace, I say, met her on the stairs as she came in. He put his hand on her shoulder to turn her footsteps to the drawing-room, and shut the door. Then came the explosion. Verena did not deny that she had been out with Pym. And Sir Dace, in very undrawing room-like language, swore that she should see Pym no more.

"We have done no harm, papa. We have been to Madame Tussaud's."

"Listen to me, Verena. Attempt to go outside this house again while that villain is in London, and I will carry you off, as I carried you from Crabb. You cannot beard *me*."

It was not pleasant to look at the face of Sir Dace as he said it. At these moments of excitement, it would take a dark tinge under-

neath the skin, as if the man, to use Jack Tanerton's expression, had a touch of the tar-brush; and the dark sullen eyes would gleam with a peculiar light, that did not remind one of an angel.

"We saw Henry the Eighth and his six wives," went on Vera. "Jane Seymour looked the nicest."

"How *dare* you talk gibberish, at a moment like this?" raved Sir Dace. "As to that man, I have cursed him. And you will learn to thank me for it."

Verena turned whiter than a sheet. Her answering words seemed brave enough, but her voice shook as she spoke them.

"Papa, you have no right to interfere with my destiny in life; no, though you are the author of my being. I have promised to be the wife of my cousin Edward, and no earthly authority shall stay me. You may be able to control my movements now by dint of force, for you are stronger than I am; but my turn will come."

"Edward Pym—hang him!—is bad to the back bone."

"I will have him whether he is bad or good," was Verena's mental answer: but she did not say it aloud.

"And I will lock you in your room from this hour, if you dare defy me," hissed Sir Dace.

"I do not defy you, papa. It is your turn, I say; and you have strength and power on your side."

"Take care you do not. It would be the worse for you."

"Very well, papa," sighed Verena. "I cannot help myself now; but in a twelvemonth's time I shall be my own mistress. We shall see then."

Sir Dace looked upon the words as a sort of present concession. He concluded Miss Verena had capitulated and would not again go a-roving. So he did not go the length of locking her in her room.

Verena was mild as milk the next day, and good as gold. She never stirred from the side of Coralie, but sat practising a new netting-stitch, her temper sweet, her face placid. The thought of stealing out again to meet Mr. Pym was apparently further off than Asia.

I have said that I was in London at this time, staying with Miss Deveen. It was curious that I should be so during those dreadful events that were so soon to follow. Connected with the business that kept me and Mr. Brandon in town, was a short visit made us by the Squire. Not that the Squire need have come; writing would have done; but he was nothing loth to do so: and it was lovely weather. He stayed with Mr. Brandon at his hotel in Covent Garden; and we thought he meant to make a week of it. The Squire was as fond of the sights and the shops as any child.

I went down one morning to breakfast with them at the Tavistock, and there met Jack Tanerton. Later, we started to take a look at a famous cricket-match that was being played at Lord's. In crossing the Marylebone Road, we met Sir Dace Fontaine.

His lodgings were close by, he said, and he would have us go in. It was the day I have just told you of; when Verena sat, good as gold, by her sister's side, trying the new netting-stitch.

The girls were in a sort of boudoir, half way up the stairs. The French would, I suppose, call it the entresol: a warm-looking room, with stained glass in the windows, and a rich-coloured carpet. Coralie and Vera were, as usual, dressed alike, in delicate summer-muslins. Vera—how pretty she looked!—had blue ribbon in her hair: her blue eyes laughed at seeing us, a pink flush set off her dimples.

"When do you sail, Captain Tanerton?" abruptly asked Sir Dace, suddenly interrupting the conversation.

"On Thursday, all being well," answered Jack.

"Do you take out the same mate?—that Pym?"

"I believe so; yes, Sir Dace."

We had to go away, or should not find standing-room on the cricket-ground. Sir Dace said he would accompany us, and called out to Ozias to bring his hat. Before the hat came, he thought better of it, and said he would not go; those sights fatigued him. I did not know what had taken place until later, or I might have thought he stayed at home to guard Verena. He gave us a cordial invitation to dinner in the evening, we must all go, he said; and Mr. Brandon was the only one of us who declined.

"I am very busy," said Jack, "but I will contrive to get free by seven this evening."

"Very busy indeed, when you can spend the day at Lord's!" laughed Verena.

"I am not going to Lord's," said Jack. Which was true. "I have come up this way to see an invalid passenger who is going out in my ship."

"Oh," quoth Vera, "I thought what a nice idle time you were having of it. Mind, Johnny Ludlow, that you take me in to dinner to-night. I have something to tell you."

Close upon the dinner-hour named, seven, the Squire and I were again at Sir Dace Fontaine's. Tanerton's cab came dashing up at the same moment. Coralie was in the drawing-room alone, her white dress and herself resplendent in coral ornaments. Sir Dace came in, and the Squire began telling him about the cricket-match, saying he ought to have been there. Presently Sir Dace rang the bell.

"How is it that dinner's late?" he asked sternly of Ozias—for Sir Dace liked to be served to the moment.

"The dinner only wait for Miss Verena, sir," returned Ozias. "She no down yet."

Sir Dace turned round sharply to look at the sofa behind him, where I sat with Coralie, talking in an undertone. He had not noticed, I suppose, but that both sisters were there.

"Let Miss Verena be told that we wait for her," he said, waving his hand to Ozias.

Back came Ozias in a minute or two. "Miss Verena, she no upstairs, sir. She no anywhere."

Of all the frowns that ever made a face ugly, the worst sat on Sir Dace Fontaine's, as he turned to Coralie.

"Have you let her go out?" he asked.

"Why of course she is not out, papa," answered Coralie, calm and smiling as usual.

"Let Esther go into Miss Verena's room, Ozias, and ask her to come down at once."

"Esther go this last time, Miss Coralie. She come down and say, Ozias, Miss Verena no upstairs at all; she go out."

"How dare ——" began Sir Dace; but Coralie interrupted him.

"Papa, I will go and see. I am sure Verena cannot be out; I am sure she is *not*. She went into her room to dress when I went into mine. She came to me while she was dressing asking me to lend her my pearl comb; she had just broken one of the teeth of her own. She meant to come down to dinner then and was dressing for it: she had no thought of going out."

Coralie halted at the door to say all this, and then ran up the stairs. She came down crest-fallen. Verena had stolen a march on them. In Sir Dace Fontaine's passionate anger, he explained the whole to us, taking but a few short sentences to do it. Verena had been beguiled into a marriage engagement with Edward Pym: he, Sir Dace, had forbidden her to go out of the house to meet him; and, as it appeared, she had set his authority at defiance. They were no doubt tramping off now to some place of amusement; a theatre, perhaps: the past evening they had gone to Madame Tussaud's. "Will you take in Miss Fontaine, Squire," concluded Sir Dace, with never a break between that and the explanation.

How dark and sullen he looked, I can recal even now. Deprived of my promised partner, Verena, I went down alone. Sir Dace following with Jack, into whose arm he put his own.

"I wish you joy of your chief officer, Captain Tanerton!" cried he, a sardonic smile on his lips.

It must have been, I suppose, about nine o'clock. We were all back in the drawing-room, and Coralie had been singing. But somehow the song fell flat; the contretemps about Verena, or perhaps the sullenness it had left on Sir Dace, produced a sense of general discomfort; and nobody asked for another. Coralie took her dainty work-box off a side-table, and sat down by me on the sofa.

"I may as well take up my netting, as not," she said to me in an under tone. "Verena began a new collar to-day—which she will be six months finishing, if she ever finishes it at all. She dislikes the work; I love it." Netting was the work most in vogue at that time. Mrs. Todhetley had just netted herself a cap.

"Do you think we shall see your sister to-night?" I asked of Coralie in a whisper.

"Of course you will, if you don't run away too soon. She'll not come in later than ten o'clock."

"Don't you fancy that it has put out Sir Dace very much?"

Coralie nodded. "It is something new for papa to attempt to control us; and he does not like to find he *can't*. In this affair I take his part; not Verena's. Edward Pym is not a suitable match for her in any way. For myself, I dislike him."

"I don't much like him, either; and I am sure Captain Tanerton does not. Your sister is in love with him, and can see no fault. Cupid's eyes are blind, you know."

"I don't know it at all," she laughed. "My turn with Cupid has not yet come, Johnny Ludlow. I do not much think Cupid could blind me. though he may be blind himself. If—why, what's this?"

Slowly lifting the lid of the box, which had been resting on her lap unopened, she saw a sealed note there, lying uppermost, above the netting paraphernalia. It was addressed to herself, in Verena's handwriting. Coralie opened it with her usual deliberation.

"Dear Coralie,—As I find you and papa intend to keep me a prisoner, and as I do not choose to be kept a prisoner, and do not think you have any right to exercise this harsh control over me, I am leaving home for a few days. Tell papa that I shall be perfectly safe and well taken care of, even if I could not take care of myself—which I *can*, as you must know. Ever yours, VERA."

Coralie laughed just a little. It seemed as if nothing ever put her out: she did know that Verena could, as the note phrased it, take care of herself. She went up to her father, who was standing by the fire talking with the Squire and Tanerton. Sir Dace, fresh from a hot country, was always chilly, as I have said before, and kept up a big fire whether it was warm or cold.

"Papa, here is a note from Verena. I have just found it in my work-box. Would you like to see what she says?"

Sir Dace put his coffee-cup on the mantel-piece, and took the note from Coralie. I never saw any expression like that of his face as he read. I never saw any face go so *darkly* white. Evidently he did not take the news in the same light way that Coralie did.

A cry broke from him. Staggering back against the shelf, he upset a vase that stood at the corner. A beautiful vase of Worcester china, with a ground of delicate gilt tracery, and a deliciously-painted landscape standing out from it. It was not at the vase, lying in pieces on the fender, we looked, but at Sir Dace. His face was contorted; his eyes were rolling. Tanerton, ever ready, caught his arm.

"Help me to find her, my friends!" he gasped, when the threatened fit had passed. "Help me this night to find my daughter! As sure as we are living, that base man will marry her to-morrow, if we do not, and then it will be too late."

"Goodness bless me, yes!" cried the Squire, brushing his hair the

wrong way, his good old red face all excitement. "Let us start at once! Johnny, you come with me. Where can we go first?"

That was the question for them all—where to go? London was a large place; and to set out to look for a young lady in it, not knowing where to look, was as bad as looking for the needle in the bottle of hay.

"She may be at that villain's place," panted Sir Dace, whose breath seemed to be all wrong. "Where does he live? You know, I suppose," appealing to Jack.

"No, I don't," said Jack. "But I can find out. I daresay it is in Ship Street. Most of——"

"Where is Ship Street?" interrupted the Squire, looking more helpless than a lunatic.

"Ship Street, Tower Hill," explained Jack; and I daresay the Squire was as wise as before. "Quite a colony of officers live there, while their vessels are lying in St. Katherine's Docks. Ship Street lies handy, you see; they have to be on board by six in the morning."

"I knew a young fellow who lodged all the way down at Poplar, because it was near to his ship," contended the Squire.

"No doubt. His ship must have been berthed in the East India Docks; they are much further off. I will go away at once, then. But," added Jack, arresting his steps, and turning to Sir Dace, "don't you think it may be as well to question the household? Your daughter may have left some indication of her movements."

Jack's thought was not a bad one. Coralie rang the bell for their own maid, Esther, a dull, silent kind of young woman. But Esther knew nothing. She had not helped Miss Verena to dress that evening, only Miss Coralie. Miss Verena said she did not want her. She believed Maria saw her go out.

Maria, the housemaid, was called: a smart young woman, with curled hair and a pink bow in her cap. Her tale was this. While the young ladies were dressing for dinner, she entered the drawing-room to attend to the fire, and found it very low. She went on her knees to coax it up, when Miss Verena came in in her white petticoat, a little shawl on her neck. She walked straight up to Miss Fontaine's work-box, opened it and shut it, and then went out of the room again."

"Did she speak to you?" asked John Tanerton.

"Yes, sir. Leastways she made just a remark—'What, that fire out again?' she said. "That was all, sir."

"Go on," sharply cried Sir Dace.

"About ten minutes later, I was at the front door, letting out the water-rate—who is sure to call, as my missis told him, at the most ill-convenient time—when Miss Verena came softly down the stairs with her bonnet and mantle on. I felt surprised. 'Don't shut me in, Maria, when I want to go out,' she said to me in a laughing sort of way, and I pulled the door back and begged her pardon. That was all, sir."

"How was she dressed?" asked Coralie.

"I couldn't say," answered the girl; "except that her clothes were dark. Her black veil was down over her face; I noticed that; and she had a little carpet-bag in her hand."

So there we were, no wiser than before. Verena had taken flight, and it was impossible to say whither.

They were for running all over the world. The Squire would have started forthwith, and taken the top of the Monument to begin with. John Tanerton, departing on his search to find Pym's lodgings, found we all meant to attend him, including Ozias.

"Better let me go alone," said Jack. "I am Pym's master at sea, and can perhaps exercise some little authority on shore. Johnny Ludlow can go with me."

"And you, papa, and Mr. Todhetley might pay a visit to Madame Tussaud's," put in Coralie, who had not lost her equanimity the least in the world, seeming to look upon the escapade as more of a joke than otherwise. "They will very probably be found at Madame Tussaud's: it is a safe place of resort when people want to talk secrets and be under shelter."

There might be reason in what Coralie said. Certainly there was no need for a procession of five people and two cabs to invade the regions of Tower Hill. So Jack, buttoning his light over-coat over his dinner toggery, got into a hansom with me, and the two old gentlemen went off to see the kings and queens.

"Drive like the wind," said Jack to the cabman. "No. 23, Ship Street, Tower Hill."

"I thought you did not know his number," I said, as we went skimming over the stones.

"I do not know Pym's: am not sure that he puts up in Ship Street. My second mate, Mark Ferrar, lives at No. 23, and I daresay he can direct me to Pym's."

Mark Ferrar! The name struck on my memory. "Does Ferrar come from Worcester, do you know, Jack? Is he related to the Battleys of Crabb?"

"It is the same," said Jack. "I have heard his history. One of his especial favourites is Mr. Johnny Ludlow."

"How strange!—strange that he should be in your ship! Does he do well? Is he a good sailor?"

"First-rate. Ferrar is really a superior young man, steady and painstaking, and has got on wonderfully. As soon as he qualifies for master, which will be in another year or two, he will be placed in command, unless I am mistaken. Our owners see what he is, and push him forward. They drafted him into my ship two years ago."

How curious it was! Mark Ferrar, the humble charity-boy, the *frog*, who had won the heart of poor King Sanker, rising thus quickly towards the top of the tree! I had always liked Mark: had seen how trustworthy he was.

Our cab might fly like the wind; but Tower Hill seemed a long way off in spite of it. Dashing into Ship Street at last, I looked about me, and saw a narrow street with narrow houses on either side, narrow doors that somehow did not look upright, and shutters closed before the downstairs windows.

No. 23. Jack got out, and knocked at the door. A young boy opened it, saying he believed Mr. Ferrar was in his parlour.

You had to dive down a step to get into the passage. I followed Jack in. The parlour door was on the right, and the boy pushed it open. A smart, well-dressed sailor sat at the table, his head bent over books and papers, apparently doing exercises by candle-light.

It was Mark Ferrar. His honest, homely face, with the wide mouth and plain features looked much the same; but the face was softened into—I had almost said—that of a gentleman. Mark finished the sentence he was writing, looked up, and saw his captain.

"Oh, sir, is it you?" he said, rising. "I beg your pardon."

"Busy at your books, I see, Mr. Ferrar?"

Mark smiled—the great, broad, genuine smile I so well remembered. "I had to put them by for other books, while I was studying to pass for chief, sir. That done, I can get to them again with an easy conscience."

"To be sure. Can you tell me where Mr. Pym lodges?"

"Close by: a few doors lower down. But I can show you the house, sir."

"Have you forgotten me, Mark?" I asked, as he took up his cap to come with us.

An instant's uncertain gaze; the candle was behind him, and my face in the shade. His own face lighted up with a glad light.

"No, sir, that indeed I have not. I can never forget Mr. Johnny Ludlow. But you are about the last person, sir, I should have expected to see here."

In the moment's impulse, he had put out his hand to me; then, remembering, I suppose, what his position was in the old days, drew it back quickly. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said, with the same honest flush that used to be for ever making a scarlet poppy of his face. But I was glad to shake hands with Mark Ferrar.

"How are all your people at Worcester, Mark?" I asked, as we went down the street.

"Quite well, thank you, sir. My old father is hearty yet, and my brother and sister are both married. I went down to see them last week, and stayed a day or two."

The greatest change in Ferrar lay in his diction. He spoke as we spoke. Associating now with men of education, he had taken care to catch up their tone and accent; and he was ever, afloat or ashore, striving to improve himself.

Ferrar opened Pym's door without knocking, dived down the step, for the houses were precisely similar, and entered the parlour. He

and Pym occupied the same apartments in each house: the parlour and the little bed-room behind it.

The parlour was in darkness, save for what light came into it from the street gas lamp, for these shutters were not closed. Ferrar went into the passage and shouted out for the landlady, Mrs. Richenough. I thought it an odd name.

She came in from the kitchen at the end of the passage, carrying a candle. A neat little woman with grey hair and a puckered face; the sleeves of her brown gown were rolled up to the elbows, and she wore a check apron.

"Mr. Pym, sir?" she said, in answer to Ferrar. "He dressed hisself and went out when he'd swallowed down his tea. He always do go out, sir, the minute he's swallowed it."

"Do you expect him back to-night?" questioned Jack.

"Why yes, sir, I suppose so," she answered. "He mostly comes in about eleven."

"Has any young lady been here this evening, ma'am?" blandly continued Jack. "With Mr. Pym?—or to enquire for him?"

Mrs. Richenough resented the question. "A young lady!" she repeated, raising her voice. "Well, I'm sure! what next?"

"Take care: it is our Captain who speaks to you," whispered Ferrar in her ear; and the old woman dropped a curtsey to Jack. Captains are captains with the old landladies in Ship Street.

"Mr. Pym's sister—or cousin," amended Jack.

"And it's humbly asking pardon of you, sir. I'm sure I took it to mean one of them fly-away girls that would like to be running after our young officers continual. No, sir; no young lady has been here for Mr. Pym, or with him."

"We can wait a little while to see whether he comes in, I presume, ma'am," said Jack.

Intimating that Mr. Pym's Captain was welcome to wait the whole night if he pleased, Mrs. Richenough lighted the lamp that stood on the table, shut the shutters, and made Jack another curtsey as she withdrew.

"Do you wish me to remain, sir?" asked Mark.

"Not at all," was the Captain's answer. "There will be a good deal to do to-morrow, Mr. Ferrar: mind you are not late in getting on board."

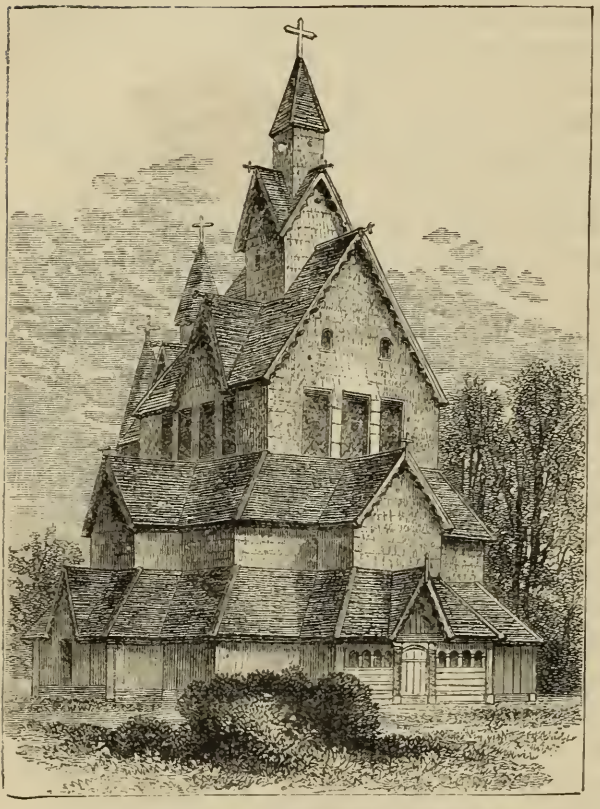
"No fear, sir," replied Ferrar.

And he left us waiting.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

ABOUT NORWAY.

By Charles W. Wood.



Church of the Twelfth Century.

GOING through Norway is, in one respect, very different from travelling in more frequented countries, where, in most cases, if you wish to reach a certain spot or place, there is no doubt as to the route to be followed. Indecision—that most uncomfortable state of mind, whether in the choice of a wife or a waistcoat—cannot arise. There, on the map, is the direct road or rail leading to your destination, and it must be taken.

It is not so in Norway. Often it seemed that twenty different roads would conduct you to a desired goal, and at length after twenty conflicting opinions, you were in danger of falling into a state of mind such as that described by an old friend some years ago. "I never," she observed on that occasion, "have to decide which of two roads I shall take, or in which of two investments I shall put my superfluous dividends, but I feel as if I should lose my senses." Dear Miss Sophia! She has not lost them yet, but this doubtful state makes her somewhat of a "trial" to her friends, who, however, would not have otherwise that embodiment of all that is excellent in woman.

Anxious to make the most of our time, and to see as much as could be seen between Christiania and Bergen, one of our first duties on arriving at the capital was to call on Mr. Bennett, without whom, in Norway, the English would be lost. It became sometimes almost ludicrous to hear during the course of one day in our travels in how many different ways people made use of Mr. Bennett. Exclamations such as the following were almost as numerous as the travellers:—

"I am anxious to get to Trondhjem, whither Bennett is forwarding my letters."

"I must knock about the Romsdal until Bennett sends me more money."

"I have lost a macintosh, and if you find it, kindly forward it to Mr. Bennett."

"That seems a charming route, certainly, but Bennett has marked it out so and so, and if I varied it, I might possibly land in perdition."

"I should have been utterly lost at such and such a station but for Bennett's phrase-book."

"I have written to Bennett, and shall abide by his instructions."

"Bennett says so and so, and Bennett must be right."

The last exclamation would occur at the end of an argument, when the speaker, driven into a corner, could only come out of it with anything like dignity by delivering the words in an irritable tone, and, metaphorically speaking, sitting upon you and shutting you up.

NORWEGIAN BRIDE.

To take railways to Norway would not be like taking coals to Newcastle, but the difficulties of travelling are not limited to the absence of railways. The choice of routes already alluded to, makes it difficult for the uninitiated to know which to adopt. Each person has his own advice to offer upon the subject, and each person's advice varies in essential particulars. In no country so near our own shores does a like confusion of ideas prevail on the subject of travelling. Even amongst the passengers on board the *Cameo*, crossing from England, this Babel—not of tongues but of opinions—asserted itself and became rampant: and it may safely be asserted that we landed at Christiania perplexed and bewildered as to the best thing to be done. Had everyone's advice been taken it would have ended in our doing nothing: for one told us to go North, another South, a third East, and a fourth West: whilst a fifth described a circle, and obligingly put down the details upon paper.

I remember telling one person, in answer to his enquiry, that we were going up to the North Cape. "That," he replied, "is a mistake; it is loss of time and very tedious. You will find nothing worth seeing beyond Trondhjem."

This was not very encouraging. We had yet to discover that all such remarks must be taken for what they are worth: according to the knowledge of the speaker; and especially as regards his power and capacity for appreciating the scenes he has visited. A stress might well be laid upon these words, for experience proves more and more that only a certain number of those who travel really take in and appreciate the beauties of nature, and consequently possess opinions worthy of credit and attention.

Within an hour of being told that to go beyond Trondhjem was little less than folly, we were again called upon to give a second questioner the same interesting information as to our plans.

"A charming trip that to the North Cape," he returned. "But everything worth seeing comes after Trondhjem. This side the old town, the journey is dull and tedious."

Here, in the course of an hour were diametrically opposed opinions from two men, each professing perfect knowledge of the subject. And this experience followed us throughout Norway wherever advice was sought: a contradiction of opinions so bewildering, that at last we gave up making enquiries, judged for ourselves, and were satisfied with the results. There are, of course, many whose advice may be trusted, but it is difficult to find them out by intuition.

As to the guide books—Murray, though good in many particulars, was somewhat bewildering: Baedeker was not then published: whilst Bennett's Guide, though excellent as far as it goes, is limited. Nevertheless it is of great use, and no one going through Norway should be without it.

Thus, on our first arrival at Christiania we should have been lost but for calling upon Mr. Bennett for information. This he gave at once, to us as to everyone, in the readiest and most obliging manner. We had a week in which to reach Bergen, and wished to see as much as possible of the best part of the country lying between that port and Christiania; including the Mörkefos or Vettisfos, a chief waterfall of Norway, of which we had heard wonderful accounts.

Mr. Bennett jotted down a route, giving to each day its appointed work, each night its place of rest. This was followed out with great success. Neither at the hotel nor elsewhere, could any reliable information be obtained. Even those who inspected our plan shook their heads and said they knew nothing about the matter.

In the slowness of their trains the Norwegians excel the Dutch; and yet the latter, for this merit or defect, according to the time, nerves, and fancy of the individual traveller, may place themselves at the head of other European countries. But here all comparison ends, for whilst the Dutch possess but a small territory sufficiently intersected by lines, Norway with its great tract of country has scarcely any railways at all. Nor is it probable that she will ever be much better off in this respect. The land is so thinly populated that railroads could never pay. From the hilly nature of the country their construction

would cost much, whilst the people are poor. And lastly, the present mode of travelling is all they need. Time is of less consequence to the Norwegians than to other people, because they have less to do. They do not rush through life, as we do, for instance, giving to one day the work of six. They breathe; the remainder of the civilised world is for the most part breathless. If they have a hundred miles to travel, they can as well devote a week to it as half a dozen hours: or if they cannot, they wisely stay at home. So that, travelling in Norway is very much what it was in England a century ago. A little slower and more leisurely, perhaps, now than then; for nowhere in Norway will you come across the fine sight of a coach and four tearing up hill and down dale at express speed. The average rate of progress is about four miles an hour; and, do what you will, taking one thing with another, you cannot get much beyond this. Their railways by comparison are not much better: of stately speed, perhaps, but irritating.

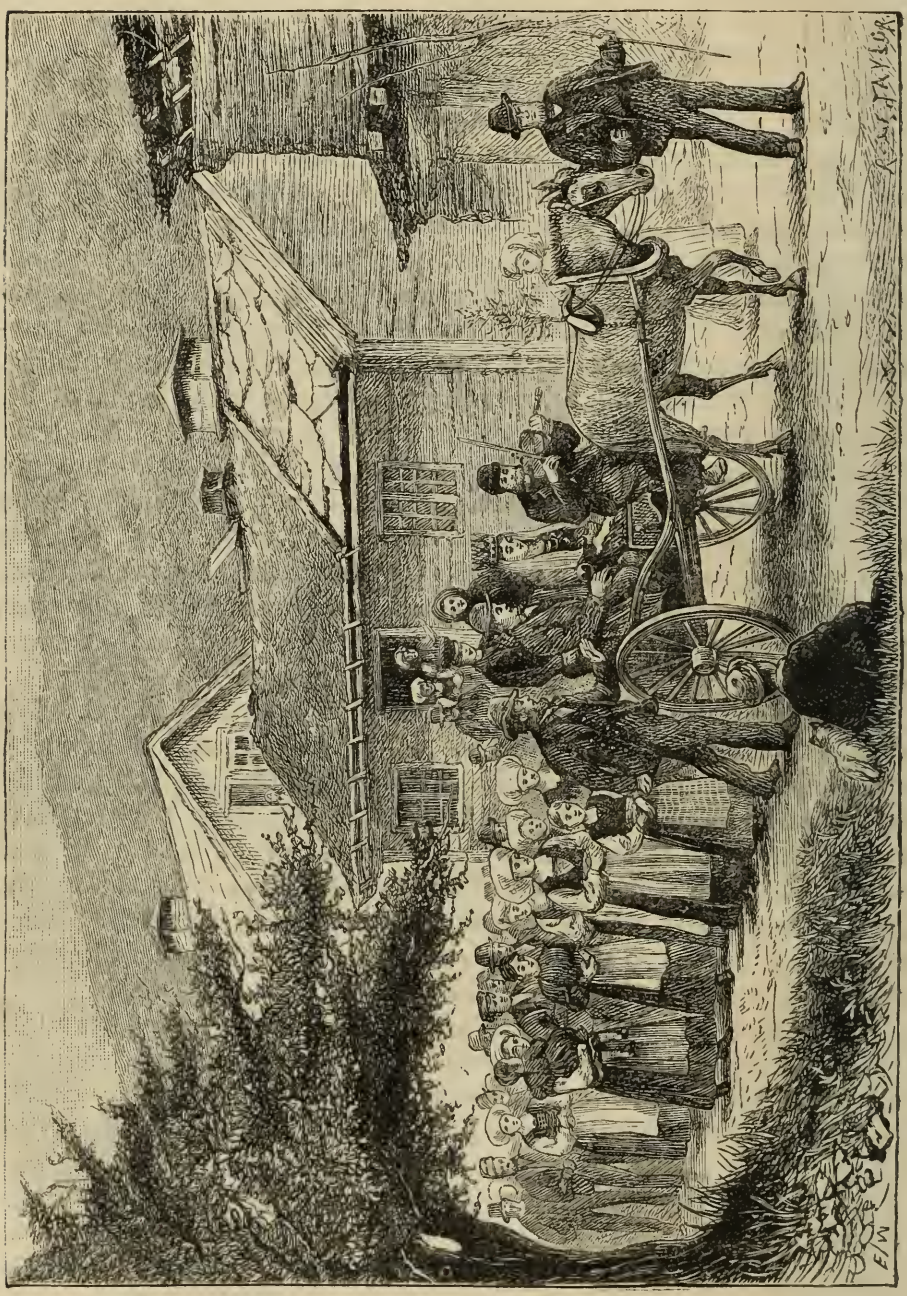
Our experience of railway travelling was limited to six hours. In that time we traversed about seventy miles of country. The train started at the early hour of six, and after a hard day's sight-seeing in Christiania, and late going to rest, we had, very unwillingly, to be stirring the next morning at five o'clock. A hasty breakfast, and the porter with our luggage upon a truck, piloted us to the station. The streets looked melancholy and deserted: the houses were not open for the day; the shops even in this early town, had not yet taken down their shutters.

The train was soon in motion, the sleeping town left behind. We passed slowly beyond the suburbs of Christiania, with their white, picturesque country-houses dotting the sloping hills; reposing amidst trees, flowers, and a certain luxuriance of cultivated vegetation, that is a rare feature in Norway. There is an air of wealth and fashion, too, about many of these houses, also peculiar to the neighbourhood, and which is lost as we progress onwards. They are the cool retreats to which the richer people of the capital escape for the hot, summer months of the year.

The journey was slow and pleasant, and the scenery beautiful. If the slowness of the train possessed no other advantage, it allowed every point to be observed almost as well as in a journey by coach. To the left as we steamed away from the capital was the beautiful Christiania Fjord, its waters blue and tranquil; to the right, a range of hills bounded the horizon, a misty purple bloom upon them, which the early morning sun was gradually lifting, as if it were a thing too refinedly beautiful and delicate for the broader, bolder hours of the day to gaze upon. We passed factories awaking to their day's work; streams of water ran beside us, now smooth, now rushing wildly over a shallow rocky bed; skirting plantations of sombre firs with mysterious depths impenetrable to the eye.

Towards Drammen the scenery became more striking. We shot into a tunnel splendidly cut out of the solid granite rock, and out

again upon a far stretching view. On the right the Drammen Fjord opened up its lake-like waters, the town itself reposing amidst hills lofty and undulating, and clothed in pine forests. To the left the



A Norwegian Wedding.

rich valley of the Lier expanded, dotted with hamlets; other tunnels were passed, and the train, skirting the very edge of a precipice, stopped at Drammen. This is one of the few important towns in Norway, and is given up to the timber and metal trade.

Here we waited many minutes, and the hasty breakfast at

Christiania was supplemented by a second. The refreshment-room displayed dishes of meat cut in thin slices, and we rashly seized upon one that looked tempting. What it was will never be known, how it tasted can never be forgotten. Sentimental visions of poison and a tomb in a foreign land took hold of the imagination. But the presiding genius, a true daughter of Anak, who looked fierce enough to be the giant's wife in the fairy tale, brought up a famous cup of

HÖNEFOS.

tea, backed by excellent bread and butter. Here at least was home-like fare, in which lurked no poisoned arrow. We could hold no converse with her, for she spoke no language but her own, of which we understood not a word: but we used the freemasonry of signs; and, as is often the case, a nearer acquaintance melted the fierce aspect into something very like gentleness of look and manner. To settle our money differences, I held out to her a handful of small coin (a large handful may comprise a very small sum) in order that she might take what was owing; and by her moderate charge she

proved that to take advantage of our ignorance was her very last thought. This was not always our experience in Norway.

Then every one returned to his carriage, and the drowsy train went on again. The scenery still continued beautiful and diversified. The river was frequently crossed, and we passed many waterfalls trickling down the hills like silver threads, whilst here and there cataracts leaped wildly into the river and helped to swell the torrent.

Towards twelve o'clock we reached Hönefos, and rumbled over the long bridge that opened up to our wondering and delighted view a vast sheet of rushing, foaming water, one cataract above and beyond and beside another, emptying itself in boiling, tearing rage into the river, whilst down below, its fury spent, it glided along, rapidly indeed, but in comparative calm. It was a lovely spot. The hills, the quaint town, and the seething cataracts closed the view on the one side, whilst on the other the country opened out in a rich, fertile plain, with quaint Norwegian farm-houses, the river winding along like a broad band of silver set with jewels composed of sun flashes, until, turning to the right, it passed, "in music" indeed, out of sight. Not the music of "the spheres," whatever that may be; but the more tangible, the more audible music of Nature, that, in one grand harmonious chant, surrounds the traveller on all sides amidst such scenes, and in an unceasing hymn of praise ascends to the regions of eternity, carrying with it the heart and soul of man.

The train halted all too short a time for us to take in the wonderful beauties of the place, and feast our gaze upon the rushing water, the greatest mass of living foam I had ever seen, of which our illustration gives but a faint idea and but a small section of the fall. We went on, and in a few moments reached Heen, a small station, and the end of our journey by rail. Here we were to take the steamer up the Spirillen lake to Sörum, our first night's resting-place.

It was a primitive, picturesque country station. Close to us on one side were hills and crags covered with wild tangle in beautiful confusion, whilst pine trees grew above and reached the summit, casting just now no long shadows, for the noonday sun was above us. A few steps down the hill, a turn to the left, and we came to the little boat that was getting up her steam and preparing to start at one o'clock. A small group of people were assembled, none of them displaying the costumes of the country. All were strangely quiet. The Norwegians, without being phlegmatic—they are too generally cheerful and contented for that—are for the most part lacking in animation. Loudness of voice and gesture is not one of their characteristics, whilst its absence is a marked feature. Their enthusiasm runs in still waters, and perhaps is therefore the deeper.

On the bridge of the steamer sat an old lady and gentleman, who proved to be going a considerable portion of our way. It might be seen at once, from the likeness, that they were brother and sister. Refined, sensitive faces, pale, clear-cut features, and an

expression brimming over with kindliness and goodwill towards mankind, distinguished them.

As long as we were together—until the afternoon of the following day—this kindliness of disposition was abundantly manifested; in thoughtfulness, in small self-sacrifices in favour of the two strangers visiting their country. It was delightful and refreshing, a species of moral tonic, to encounter such people, who go through the world scattering a seed broadcast that must one day bear a rich harvest.

The devotion of this brother and sister to each other was such as might be expected in lovers. Often it was impossible to avoid smiling at their demonstrations of mutual affection—carried perhaps to excess according to English views—yet delightful at their age from its very youthfulness. Here, at least, were two enthusiastic people, exceptions to their race. In this our first experience of travelling in Norway, they were of great service to us, pointing out their system of doing things, and making clear much that would long have remained misty and uncertain.

Mr. B., as we will call him, spoke a little English and a little French, and Miss B. a little German; by which means we managed to get along with some degree of understanding. Not another soul on board spoke anything but Norwegian. Before starting we managed to make the captain comprehend that, if within the range of possibility, we should like some dinner on board—we had thirty-five miles and a six hours' journey before us: and he, by signs that would have made the fortune of a clown in a pantomime, replied that they were quite equal to the occasion.

The voyage up the lake was one of our pleasantest bits of Norwegian travelling. The banks on either side were varied and picturesque. Here and there the slopes were cultivated, and evidently fertile. Houses were dotted about, and small settlements, many of them with slanting, overhanging roofs, like Swiss châlets; others of light wooden construction painted some gay colour, like the houses of Christianssand. Every now and then the whistle sounded, the engines stopped, and a small boat shot out from the shore, to bring up a passenger or carry off some cargo. Once, we went alongside, and landed many bags of meal, and stayed there half an hour: an opportunity seized upon by the few passengers, to land and take a glass of beer with their friends.

In the distance, mountains, gloomy and severe, rose abruptly, and we were soon upon them: the little steamer looking dwarfed and tiny as she hurried past their frowning, barren sides. Great masses of rock, stern and terrible, that were too much for kindly, gentle Miss B., who clasped her brother's arm as if for protection from their threatening looks. Here and there we passed over a small rapid, through which the little boat tossed as on a miniature sea: whilst not unfrequently we had to steer out of the way of huge rafters of

pine logs lashed together. One spot on the hill side had been worn smooth and bare as a road, and for a moment we wondered what had caused this bald place amongst the fir-clad hills: until, at the summit, dwarfed by distance, might be seen men hard at work; and great pine logs, stripped of their bark, came rolling down the incline, splashed into the water, and shot out upon their downward journey.

Presently a fresh, clean-looking maiden in a snow-white cap and apron came up, and smilingly informed us that dinner was served. Instinct more than reason interpreted her message. We followed her into the little cabin, and with a "Var so got"—literally "Be so good," the "If you please" of the Norwegians, and the phrase used by them on all possible occasions, whether telling you that your dinner is served, or your carriole waiting, or politely excusing an injury—she closed the door upon us, and left us to our repast. It consisted of tinned beef steaks, potatoes well boiled, and excellent beer, the usual beverage of the country. It is light and frothy, and served in bottles. If drunk as soon as opened it is very palatable, but it quickly becomes flat, stale, and unprofitable. We were glad enough to break our fast with fare so much better than we expected, and did justice to a meal for which the sum of two shillings and threepence was charged.

The lake was about sixteen miles long; at the end of which the boat passed into the river Baegna, the only difference being that the stream now narrowed and became more rapid. At certain times the river is not navigable, and then travellers have to land at Naes, and continue the journey by road. The scene as we steamed up the river was beautiful. To the left rose the huge and precipitous mass of rocky mountain that seemed to terrify Miss B., which really looked like some petrified monster of night-mare dimensions, about to take back its animation and annihilate us. Dark, gloomy, and frowning were its sides, a perpendicular wall rising high and wide out of the water. It was almost a relief to pass beyond into the regions of more smiling, fertile hills, giving shelter to farms and plantations of birch trees, some of which, uprooted by the waters in their rising, were nodding a farewell to life, and sinking into the stream.

Thus we made way, until, about seven o'clock, we reached Sörum. Mr. Bennett's plan had marked out a stage further on by land; but our kindly fellow-travellers were going to make Sörum their head-quarters for that night, and urged us to do likewise. A proposal we willingly, and wisely, adopted.

Up the little landing pier, and a few yards onwards, we came to the settlement of Sörum, our first sight and experience of a Norwegian "station." It is by the help of these "stations" that one gets through the country, and without them travelling would be out of the question. The stations, as a rule, take their names from the people to whom they belong, and who generally live in them. They are for the most part small farms, more or less cultivated and productive

according to their individual resources, and the intelligence and industry of their owners. Some yield grain, others food for cattle: sheep, cows, and horses; and goats often in abundance. You may see the little creatures skipping about high up on the hill sides, from point to point and from rock to rock, with wonderful agility. Towards evening, passing along the road, you may hear a boy or girl with a peculiar jödel cry, something like that of the Swiss peasant, but more weird and unfamiliar, collecting the goats or the cows with this simple call, that in the grand and solemn stillness which reigns in these great solitudes, goes floating far up the heights, and brings the

On the Road to Sörum.

scattered cattle together, who come leisurely down, one following another in a long, winding string that you may trace for a considerable distance. Then, when they are all landed and milked, some are put away for the night, and some are sent back to pass it upon the mountains.

These "stations" are the farm-houses and their outbuildings, never originally intended for the uses to which they are now partly devoted. With the increase of travellers in Norway, the Government and the people have recognised the greater need of accommodation; and the stations have gradually developed from the poorest and roughest quarters into something, not luxurious, and still humble and primitive, but clean and decent, and sometimes tolerably comfortable.

It is all very different now from what it was in days gone by. A fellow-traveller told me that when going through Norway twenty years ago, he and a party of six ladies and as many gentlemen were all ushered into one bed-room at one of the principal stations—the only bed-room the house contained. This had to be given up to the ladies, and the gentlemen sat up in an adjoining room: much to the surprise of the unsophisticated Norwegians, who could not understand why people should make themselves so unnecessarily uncomfortable.

It is not so now. Accommodation has greatly increased, even in the last five years: and to-day a traveller will rarely find himself at fault for a bed, though not always given a bed-room to his own share. Yet rooms, beds, and stations are still limited, and should travellers increase rapidly in Norway, it is not easy to see how the wants of the case will be supplied.

The station at Sörum was one of the most primitive in Norway, and perhaps it was as well for our experiences not to begin with the best. On the other hand, it was one of the very cleanest, and the people were the most civil and attentive. For such a station the fare was excellent: and nowhere, as it afterwards proved, were we more comfortable than at Sörum. It is rather out of the beaten track of travellers, especially English travellers, and it has remained among the least changed.

Most primitive it seemed to our first impressions, and in our ignorance I am not sure that we quite appreciated our blessings. The house set apart for travellers was on the left: opposite was the building devoted to horses, and the open shed for vehicles: to the right the house where the people of the station, and any homely travellers that might pass that way, lived and slept: the whole settlement thus forming three sides of a quadrangle, all built of wood dark with age, and very picturesque. To the left, in a line with our building, was the storehouse, which stood upon four rough pedestals of stones, placed one upon another without mortar or cement, and was thus kept high and dry above the damp earth, the overflowing of the waters, the deep snows of winter. The interior was devoted to the storing of all articles of food and use that the damp might injure: provisions to carry them through a long winter's cold, and dull, dark days: their season of inaction and little work.

We entered upon a good-sized room, the general sitting-room of the station, roughly, yet not uncomfortably, furnished. A bare floor, an ordinary round deal table, spread with a white cloth, a few common chairs, a horse-hair sofa, and a sort of half cabinet, half chest of drawers, painted red, decorated with quaint, gaudy flowers, and bearing a date and the name of the hostess in a flourishing inscription. This is a very general piece of furniture in Norway, and seems to be a kind of certificate of marriage; not very easy to carry about in the pocket, but, on the other hand, not like "marriage lines," capable of being mislaid or overlooked.

The charm of the room lay in its windows, and the views they looked upon. Sloping hills and mountains, covered with rich plantations of trees that glinted in the sun, and now cast long shadows. On the further side, gloomy pine forests, relieved by the brighter green of the larch, here and there a barren mountain, all rock and granite, cold and stern. To the left flowed the river, up which we had just travelled, the little steamer moored to the landing-stage, at rest until six o'clock to-morrow morning, when it would start on its journey back to Heen.

Our bed-room, immediately above the sitting-room, was large and airy. Four small wooden beds, one in each corner; a rough wash-hand-stand under one window, a basin on a chair under another. Next to this, two smaller rooms, occupied by Mr. and Miss B.

Our first visitor, after we had looked round, settled our small amount of luggage, and found everything surprisingly clean, was a goat with formidable horns, that came trotting up the wooden stairs, paid us a visit of inspection, and then went off in search of prey. Its fancy fastened upon a straw hat lying upon the table. This, with perfect indifference to the laws of meum and tuum, it appropriated to itself, and, without quick rescue, would have demolished, perhaps devoured. Then up came the hostess after the truant, and a chase began in which the goat had the best of it; until it darted downstairs again, followed by the woman, breathless and out of temper; uttering words it was no doubt well neither we nor the goat could interpret.

Then we too went down, and found supper ready; and Miss B. quickly followed us into the room. Her manner of entering was regal. One step forward, then a courtly curtsey to one of us: another step, and a second curtsey to the other: a third step, and a curtsey that embraced both. As we were in duty bound to return the civility, a looker-on might have taken us for a small court, making a royal progress through the country. Next came Mr. B., as unceremonious as his sister was stately, all fatherly kindness and anxiety for our welfare. Miss B. presided at the teapot, and, in her nervous anxiety to do the honours with credit to her nation, the dear, kind, gentle lady upset the lid into A.'s cup, which he held uplifted, and sent the hot fluid down his arm, of which it made more free than welcome. A. said afterwards, with the true spirit of gallantry, it was worth a small amount of pain to receive her showers of graceful curtseys and apologies, and to subdue her distress. But the slight mishap was soon remedied, and in nowise took from the happiness and harmony of the tea-table.

The meal over, in the setting sun, we wandered for a short walk into the woods behind the house. The forest was casting mysterious depths, far into which we did not penetrate. Spread out before us, through and around and amidst the trees, in wildest profusion and most exquisite beauty, grew the tender fronds of the soft green oak

fern; so abundant that it was impossible to place the foot and not crush them.

Nothing could be lovelier than the scene. The narrow path leading through this maze of verdure; the setting sun casting its red glow through the trees, lighting up the sky, and the floating clouds, tingeing the opposite mountains, and warming the waters of the river glowing to our left. Here and there a small silvery waterfall might be traced, trickling down the mountain side. Amidst the ferns wild flowers grew in abundance, some of which are not to be found in England.

Lower sank the sun, each moment changing and deepening the tints and shadows upon the landscape: until, disappearing, as it seemed, with a sudden bound, he warned us to return.

We found Mr. B. at the door, smoking a long pipe: with this lover of mankind, a very calumet of peace. We talked of many things English and Norwegian, until all the shadows melted into darkness and night; and the station people disappeared one by one; and the hush of repose, that solemn stillness that makes itself felt, fell upon all things: and we, too, sought a well-earned rest.

Alas, the next morning was wet, and our ardour was considerably damped in consequence. Our programme would not admit of a day lost on the road, and yet to travel in a downpour of rain was neither profitable nor pleasant. But at ten o'clock the clouds seemed to break, and hope set in. Miss B., who had stepped over for a moment into the other house, came to the door and called me in to show me their system of churning in Norway, and also a dish of trout just taken out of the river.

It was a gloomy room. The floor was dark and earthy; in the chimney burned a fire of wood and peat. In the middle of the floor a maid was splashing away at a churn: just such a churn as I had seen in Shetland some time before, in the hands of a certain Kirstie: a long, narrow barrel, and a long churn-staff that the strong maiden was working up and down to a distinct measure. It was hard labour, and as the drops went splashing about the room, we kept at a respectful distance. The trout, fresh and beautiful, were Miss B.'s especial admiration and delight, who tenderly enquired whether we had them in England, what they were called, and whether they were duly appreciated.

Just then Mr. B. came in with the welcome news that the sun was breaking through the clouds, the rain had ceased, and the day would yet be glorious.

So it proved. Then, as one obstruction was removed, another sprang up. Only two carrioles were to be had, and one stolkjaer: the latter a machine consisting of a long flat piece of wood suspended upon two wheels, on which a seat is erected holding two people. They are rough and uncomfortable, whilst a well-built carriole, on the contrary, is a very pleasant conveyance. These never hold

more than one person. The seat is small, and the springs are often merely a continuation of the shafts, which are so long that the horse seems a long way from the driver. In these carrioles you have to be your own Jehu; your luggage is strapped on behind; and the post-boy, who has to bring back horse and carriole from the next station, sits upon it. The harness is generally made of cord, and, if hard, answers every purpose; but new cord cuts the hands, and is disagreeable to hold.

Mr. B., with his usual good-nature, insisted upon our taking the carrioles; he and his sister the stolkjaer. We did not then know the sacrifice he was making; but all the wisdom in the world would have made no difference: in a choice between better and worse, nothing would have induced him to choose the better. Such characters are rare as they are beautiful.

Travelling by Carriole, Norway.

Behold us, then, at eleven o'clock, en route. Mr. and Miss B. taking the lead, A. following, and I bringing up the rear: an unusual, lively, and decidedly high-spirited cavalcade. It is, indeed, difficult, for any one but a confirmed hypochondriac to be anything but high-spirited in Norway, with its freedom from restraint, its Bohemian sort of life, its light, bracing air. A crack of the whips—as primitive as the harness: a farewell to the worthy folk of Sörum, who turned out in a body to see us start, and away went the fresh, jolly, strong little horses: Miss B.'s head enveloped in a hood, which the wind inflated to dimensions so extraordinary and grotesque that A.'s horse once or twice came to a dead stand, opened his eyes, pricked up his ears, and gazed in a paroxysm of astonishment and admiration: from which he could only be aroused to a sense of his duties by the enforcement of severe measures.

THE GREY COTTAGE.

By Mrs. Claxton.

THE cottage was old and grey. A pear tree ran over the front of it; there was a wooden porch covered with jessamine and honeysuckle, which promised to be very sweet and delightful in the spring. It stood in a pretty garden, sloping down to a thick hedge; beyond this, and much below it, ran the lane leading up into the village. A large walnut tree and some tall fir trees shaded the cottage to the south; while the hill, on the side of which it was built, protected it from the north winds: they blew keenly enough at times. An orchard divided us from our neighbours at the back; from the front we looked over the thatched roofs of a few low dwellings to the wide valley beyond, where a lazy river wound in and out through clumps of pollards. A picturesque mill and loch lay to the left; to the right a graceful spire rose in the distance.

Such was my new home. It was chosen partly for its retirement and its pretty garden, chiefly on account of its low rental and the inexpensive neighbourhood. The nearest town was three miles off; more than that when the floods were out, as was often the case, for then the short cut across the fields was impassable.

This Grey Cottage—called so, possibly, from the old greystone of which it was built—had belonged to an aged man of the name of Vallyer. He had purchased it some fifty years before. By nature, as we heard, he had been close and miserly, saving up by little and little until he was reputed to be very rich. His wife he lost shortly after their marriage; and since that time he had led a most solitary life, the only other inmate of the cottage being an aged housekeeper, very deaf, and as eccentric as himself. Occasionally a married sister would come over to spend a few hours with him, but never stayed over the night. These visits were like angels' in being few and far between; but in another respect very unlike angels', for they never took place without a quarrel, and a declaration on the part of the sister, Mrs. Bittern, that she would never enter the house again. People said her only reason for making these quarrels up, was the old man's money. Be that as it might, virtue proved to be its own reward, for when he died it was found he had left her nothing.

The old gentleman was wonderfully fond of his garden, working in it the greater part of the day, and seldom going beyond it. It was strange that with all his love for his flowers, he should never have cared to show them to his neighbours. On the contrary, he did what he could to keep them from their sight. During his life the place was unknown land; and, consequently, the subject of much

curiosity, especially to the village children. Mr. Vallyer always seemed to be on the look-out if they attempted to peer and pry through the hedge or over the gate, and he carried a thick stick, with which he would make sudden lunges and thrusts, scattering the young visitors ignominiously. It was not safe for juvenile eyes to gaze into Mr. Vallyer's property. Another peculiarity he had. It was to stand by the garden gate in the gloaming leaning on his stick, and watching the few people who went up and down the lonely lane. No matter what the night was, under the bright frosty stars of winter, or in the mist following a heated day of summer, there would stand old Michael Vallyer.

It has been said that he was supposed to have saved money. None—save a few pounds—could be found after his death. It then became known that he had purchased a life annuity, which had died with him. The cottage and furniture were left to a nephew, a chemist in London. Not requiring to live in it himself, he advertised it to be let furnished. Two maiden ladies had taken it first by the month; but they had quickly given notice to leave, complaining of damp and other disagreeables. They had, however, always been considered rather crotchety people. I, with my two pretty nieces, Hilda and Cecily, took possession at Michaelmas, a few weeks after they left. We were pleased with our country home. The few neighbours were friendly and sociable. I began to look upon the little Grey Cottage as a haven of rest after a changeful and troubled life.

As our old servant, Martha, was not quite as active as she used to be, I enquired for a char-woman, to come in twice a week to assist her, and was recommended to a Mrs. Briggs. She did not do her work amiss, but her propensity to gossip was irrepressible.

"You should see the place in the spring, ma'am, when the gilly-flowers and stocks is out," she said to me one day, when I was in the kitchen making a tart, and she stood at the other end of it cleaning brasses and tins. "It looked beautiful when the Miss Jessops first came here."

"I wonder what made them leave so soon?" I remarked. "Damp, the agent told me: but I have discovered no damp about the cottage."

"It weren't the damp, ma'am," was Mrs. Briggs's answer, and I thought her tone significant. "At first they liked it—oh, so much: but in a little time they said they must leave. Doubtless," lowering her voice, "the ladies had their reasons."

"Perhaps they found it too lonely?"

"No, and it weren't exactly the loneliness," returned Mrs. Briggs. "Not that altogether, ma'am."

I asked no more; for gossip, though Mrs. Briggs's chief failing, is not one of mine; but went on with my pastry-making. She, rubbing fiercely at the copper tea-kettle, began again after an interlude.

"Did you chance to hear nothing about this cottage, ma'am?"

"Nothing particular. Why? What is there to hear?"

"Perhaps I ought not to tell it you, ma'am; you might be scared," returned she, as she looked at me over the kettle.

"Scared! Not I. Pray tell what you have to tell—if it concerns the cottage."

"Well, ma'am, it's a healthy place and a pretty place; that's for sure. But—it's about the old gentleman."

"The old gentleman!"

"Old Mr. Vallyer. They say he is in the house."

"Why, what do you mean?" I asked, feeling somewhat as the woman had said—scared.

"It's said, ma'am, that he never went out of it, though his funeral did; that he stopped in to haunt it. Folks talk of something that happened here years and years ago; some friend of Mr. Vallyer's came from over the seas to visit him. They used to quarrel, and one night the stranger was found dead in the garden. Some thought the death didn't come about by accident; that Vallyer knew more than he said. Anyway, it's pretty sure he can't rest now, but is about the place troubling it."

I am not especially superstitious, but I confess I did not like the tale. Mrs. Briggs continued. Her tongue, once oiled, would have gone on for ever.

"The first to see him was the Widow Munn's children; he had been dead about a month. I was at her place, helping her with a day's washing. 'Mother,' said they, running in at dusk, 'we have seen the old gentleman at the Grey Cottage; he's leaning over the gate with his stick just as he used to be.' They weren't frightened, those young children; they told it as a bit of news. The Widow Munn looked at me, and I at her, and then she whipped 'em all round, thinking it might be the best way to put it out of their heads."

I laughed; and said the children might have been mistaken.

"So they might, ma'am," assented Mrs. Briggs. "The next to see it was a stranger: a young man coming through the village one moonlight night on his way to London; he was walking it. He went into the public-house, down there in Greenford, and called for a glass of ale. While he was sitting by the fire drinking it, he began to talk. 'What uncivil people you seem to have in these parts,' says he. 'I asked an old gentleman, standing at his garden-gate half way up the hill, whether there was a public-house near, and he would not answer me; he just stared straight in my face with his glassy-looking eyes, and never spoke.' The company in the tap-room stopped talking at this, and looked at one another. 'What sort of an old gentleman was it,' they asked; 'how was he dressed?'

"'He wore a long grey coat, with a curious little cape to it,' says the traveller, 'and a spotted white kerchief, tied loose round his neck, with the ends hanging, and he had a stick in his hand. *Very* civil,

I must say he was! I asked him the question again in a louder tone, thinking he might be deaf; but he never answered, only continued to stare at me.' It was the dress of old Vallyer, ma'am; he never wore any other, and I'll leave you to judge what the company at the White Hart thought of it. A deal of talk went about Greenford next day."

"Where is the old maid-servant?"

"She went away. They left her in the house to show it, but after a week or two she took the key to the agent, saying there was something she did not like about the place, and she shouldn't stop in it. Just before the Miss Jessops took it, that was."

"No wonder the Miss Jessops were frightened away from the cottage if such tales were told to them," I remarked. "Why, you Greenford people must have driven them away!"

"Ah, well, I see, ma'am, you don't believe in it. It was said the ladies saw him in the house as well as out of it, though I can't speak for certain as to what happened. They went away all quiet and composed like; they didn't want to be laughed at."

We found that Mr. Vallyer's ghost was firmly believed in by the neighbourhood. Fortunately my nieces were sensible girls, and only laughed. The stories told were made a source of amusement to them, and their young friends. They treated the subject as a good joke; sometimes intruding irreverently near the confines of that strange and mysterious world beyond whose veil we know so little, and which, it has always seemed to me, should be treated with respect, if not with awe. On one occasion I felt obliged to expostulate.

"Why, Aunt Cameron," exclaimed Hilda, laughing, "I am almost sure you believe in the ghost!"

Cecily took the matter more seriously, and agreed with me that too much fun had been made. After that, it was a favourite joke of Hilda's to tell her friends confidentially that her Aunt and Cecily believed in old Vallyer's reappearance.

Weeks passed away, during which we saw nothing, and the winter set in. A young nephew of mine, and cousin of my nieces, came to spend some days with us; chiefly, I believe, on account of the skating. His arrival made Hilda and Cecily think it high time to make a little return for the kindness and hospitality which had been shown to us; or, rather, to induce me to think it. I let myself be persuaded, and cards went out for a small evening party.

The weather was now intensely cold. The river had been flooded before the frost set in; not only that, but also the meadows were frozen over. We might almost have been at the North Pole, such an expanse of snow and ice did we overlook. The village seemed skating mad; and, not content with the day's amusement, our young people would remain on the ice until late at night, for the moon, nearing the full, shone brilliantly in a cloudless sky.

Leonard, my nephew, was a clever and amusing young fellow, holding strong views on many subjects, and propounding them with all the energy and decision of youth and inexperience. Old customs and old beliefs were not good enough for him—"nous avons changé tout cela" was his motto. I do not think he really believed, or rather disbelieved, all he pretended to do. He liked to startle us, and delighted in shocking the prejudices of his cousins, especially of Hilda, who was a warm partizan of that very ultra school of theology which is now so prevalent amongst the young and imaginative. On one point, however, they both agreed—a strong disbelief in the supernatural.

The evening of the party arrived, and brought our guests. Sixteen in all, including our own young people; I made the seventeenth. The time passed pleasantly, and lastly dancing was introduced. They had had a few quadrilles, when one gentleman had to leave, to catch a midnight train: and when a double set of Lancers was formed after his departure, one was lacking to make it up. There were only fifteen. You may think it strange I should enter into such particulars, but you will see.

"You must do double duty, Leonard," I said.

"No, aunt," exclaimed Hilda, with a saucy smile. "You shall invite old Mr. Vallyer to join us. I wish he would!"

All laughed; and then our neighbour, Mrs. Goldsmith, a tall, handsome woman, called out that she had no objection to dance with the old gentleman—should like to. "See, here he is!" she went on, making a bow to the sofa cushion in her careless merriment, and taking it up in her arms. "You are not accustomed to dancing, sir, so we will go to the side. Now let us begin."

I had been so used to playing dance music, that I did it quite mechanically, often turning half round on the music stool to watch the dancers while my fingers were busy. My nieces were fine-looking girls, and I liked to follow Hilda's striking figure and Cecily's quiet grace as they moved through the mazes of the dance. After striking up the first inspiriting chords of the Lancers, I turned to see how Mrs. Goldsmith was getting on with her "partner." She stood opposite to Cecily and young Kirby, a rising engineer, with whom she was dancing. Hilda and Leonard were at the bottom of the set.

There was a good deal of laughing at the cushion at first, but it soon subsided, and I was glad of it, for I had fatigued myself much in preparing for our little entertainment; my head ached now, and the mirth jarred upon my nerves. I began to feel in that stage of weariness when voices sound far off; when the hands work on at whatever occupies them, without help from the brain; when the thoughts roam away and the eye sees things mistily. It suddenly struck me that the room was growing very cold. Just as Mrs. Goldsmith was passing me, cushion in arm, I felt a shiver.

"Ten degrees below freezing point last night, and colder to-night," I thought to myself. "What shall we come to?"

Turning round again to look at the dancing, I noticed how very pale they appeared, and how singularly quiet. Why had they ceased talking? As Cecily glided past me, I was struck by her face It was white as marble, and her blue eyes were strangely distended and fixed with a puzzled kind of fascination on Mrs. Goldsmith. Mine followed them. That lady was moving through the figure in her stately manner, the cushion still in her arms, and a fixed smile on her lips; and by her side—now, was it an overwrought brain or was I dreaming? Surely the latter, for I felt no surprise, no alarm —*there danced by her side a little old man!*

Everything seemed in a mist now, as though the night were foggy, and the fog had got into the room, so I could not see the stranger clearly. The music sounded muffled, and my thoughts went back to former nights in London, when the thick yellow vapour enveloped the streets, and link boys were out, and conductors led omnibuses, and people shouted with hollow voices. It seemed hours since I began to play that set of Lancers.

This old man was dressed in a long grey coat, with a little cape, and a white spotted neckerchief loosely tied, and he carried a thick stick in his hand. He danced in an old-world fashion, executing his steps with great precision, and making formal bows to his partner and the rest of the company. Just then Mrs. Goldsmith laid the cushion back on the sofa; shivering apparently with cold, she took up a scarf, and wrapped it closely round her, dancing all the time. It was now the grand chain in the last figure, and for a moment or two I lost sight of the old man. Suddenly there was a wild scream —the dance stopped—Cecily had fainted!

A medical man, Mr. Brook, was of the party. He attributed Cecily's attack to the intense coldness of the weather, and to the morning's skating, when she must have over-fatigued herself. The depression most of them had felt during the last set of quadrilles he put down to the same cause—unusual cold.

Cecily continued very poorly the following day. She confided to me privately her extraordinary impressions of the previous evening. I found them to be similar to my own; but I mentioned nothing to her about myself, and laughed a little.

"But I did see the old man, Aunt Cameron," she persisted. "He was by Mrs. Goldsmith's side."

I would not listen. On the contrary, I treated the matter entirely from a common-sense point of view; endeavouring to persuade her that the whole thing was due to an overwrought imagination. Indeed I was by no means sure that such was not the case. It was more likely that our brains, hers and mine, should have worked in the same groove, been "en rapport," as the mesmerists would have expressed it, than that we should really have seen an apparition. We are all

aware of those invisible magnetic wires which so often flash a message from one brain to another, those mysterious reminders which at times precede the arrival of an absent friend—the dream at night followed by the letter of the morrow. "There are," as Hamlet hath it, "more things in heaven amd earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy." What we call the supernatural may be but the gleams of a hidden science sometime to be revealed.

Cecily tried to take up my view of the case. We agreed not to mention the matter to Hilda, or to anyone else.

"Please, Mr. Cameron, you are wanted," said Martha to my nephew, interrupting us that same evening when we were all sitting together, young Kirby, the engineer, being with us.

"Who is it?" cried Leonard.

"Will you please come out, sir; he won't give any name."

Leonard went out. He came back again in a minute or two, and beckoned to Kirby, who was playing chess with Hilda.

"It's nothing," he said, as we all started up. "Only Martha has been frightened at some one standing at the back door and then going away without speaking. We'll go round the garden to make sure no tramps are about."

I left the room myself, thinking of tramps, and of nothing else. The cottage was so low and so covered by fruit trees and trellis, that it would have been a very easy matter to climb into the bed-rooms. My window, just over the porch, had especial facilities that way, and I went up to it. Opening the lattice very gently, I concealed myself behind the curtain and looked out. The moon was bright. The voices of the two young men reached me from below.

"It's queer, Kirby—after all the talk, you know. Martha says she opened the door to get some wood, and there the old man stood. She thought it was a real tramp, mind you, and she did not like his staring in her face and never speaking. I am sure I saw him; he was going round towards the orchard."

"Very odd!" replied young Kirby. "I saw him too. He was leaning over the front gate."

"And, by Jove, there he is now!"

"Where?"

"At the gate."

"I don't see him!"

"Nor do I now—he's gone."

Yes, there was no mistake; *I* saw him too from my window; the old man leaning on his stick at the gate, where he used to stand so often in life. Presently the two young men came in, and I went down.

"Have you seen any tramp, Leonard?"

"No, aunt. Not a tramp."

"What then? Anything?"

"*A little old man leaning on a stick.*"

"I saw him too, Mrs. Cameron," added Mr. Kirby.

"We had better say nothing to the girls," whispered Leonard.

"No, nor to anyone else, Leonard. The whole place would be astir."

"What—on account of old Vallyer?"

I nodded. Just then the girls came running out.

"What a long time you have been! Have you found him?"

"Of course not," Leonard replied. "He had got clear off: those tramps are cunning. Let us have supper—it's awfully cold!"

This second little episode put me very much out of conceit with my pretty cottage. My nieces had a pressing invitation from Leonard's mother, and were to return with him to London. I thought I would go away somewhere too.

It was the afternoon of the day before Leonard and they were to leave. We had had one heavy fall of snow, and the air was again thick with the feathery flakes. Strangely depressed, both mentally and bodily, I stood alone at the window and looked out over the valley, which lay so still under its great white shroud. At last Cecily came in and stood by me.

"You will be very lonely, aunt, after we are gone."

"Ay." And then we stood in silence.

Suddenly the girl laid her hand on my arm, as though to attract my attention. A chilly draught of wind seemed to blow through the room, raising the hair off my forehead with a pricking sensation.

A feeble, bent figure, leaning heavily on a stick, passed slowly and silently from the door to the other window. A coal falling in the grate, the flame flickered up, showing distinctly the old man whom I had twice before seen!

The apparition, for such I now felt it to be, stood looking out of the window, with a worn, sad expression, such as his face might often have borne in the lonely, loveless life he had chosen for himself. After a moment or two of perfect stillness I could bear it no longer. Springing to the fire I stirred it vigorously; the flames rose up into the chimney and the little room was in a blaze of light.

The old man was gone! Cecily grasped my hands in both her own, for she had seen it too; every trace of the usual bright colour had vanished from her lips and face, and she was trembling from head to foot.

I went up with them the next day, and took old Martha with me. I could not stay in the place any more. The agent was informed of these facts, and he let me off easily, and made no remonstrance; so we thought mine could not have been the first complaint of the sort.

It is said the grey cottage is to be a cottage no longer; that it is to be pulled down. And I sincerely hope it will be.

THE EXILES OF SIBERIA.

MANY years ago there appeared a book under the title of "Elizabeth; or, the Exiles of Siberia." For long it retained its popularity, and even in this day is still read. It is possible that some of our readers have shed tears over the sorrows of the heroic Elizabeth; and to such the following facts on which Madame Cottin founded her story may not be uninteresting. They are authentic, and extracted from letters written at the time from St. Petersburg.

LETTER THE FIRST.

"March, 1805.

"I dined on the 26th March at the Princess Torrubetskoy's, and there saw a most interesting young woman, not long since arrived from Siberia, which tremendous journey of 4,000 versts (miles) she performed on foot, quite alone, and begging her bread all the way. She came here with the laudable intention of throwing herself at the Emperor's feet and petitioning him to show mercy to her aged father, who was banished during the reign of Catherine. She had formed the resolution when only 16 years old, but her parents protesting against it, she was obliged to submit, though without abandoning her project, for she never ceased to supplicate their permission, until, wearied with her unceasing prayers, they at last consented. At the age of 22 she commenced her arduous undertaking; they gave her their blessing, and all the money they possessed, which amounted to 10 copecks; and soliciting a few copecks more from their equally poor but charitable neighbours—for there are no rich people there—she left Tobolsk with only a rouble (which varies in value with the exchange, but seldom exceeds half-a-crown) in her pocket, and very thinly clad, as the climate is much warmer than ours. She suffered exceedingly from cold as well as hunger; but God, she said, raised her up many kind friends, which gave her courage to pursue her journey, though it could not flatter her hopes of success, for she knew not the extent of her father's crimes for which he was banished. She never walked less than twenty-five, but oftener thirty miles a day, without meeting with any particular adventure on the road. She began each day's journey with the rising sun, and sought any shelter Providence might offer for the approaching night; she was frequently obliged to stop two or three days on account of her feet swelling through fatigue. Within a few versts of Moscow, she was received at a convent and kindly taken care of for a month. From that place she dated the end of her journey, as she obtained a conveyance from thence to St. Petersburg in a kabitky. She completed her journey in nine months. The ladies of the convent became so

interested in her that they recommended her to the Princess Torrubetskoy, a lady famed for humanity, and to whom the poor girl told her wishes, hopes and fears. The Princess, ever delighted with an opportunity to exercise her benevolence, now had a glorious one. Such an instance of filial piety and affection in a person of her youth and sex, she thought so sublime that she determined to use every exertion in her power to accomplish the wished-for object of her journey. She therefore immediately wrote a letter and petition to the Emperor, which was presented by Mr. Novasiltgoff. The Emperor, who is all goodness, delayed not a moment in sending for the young woman, who appeared before him, trembling with weakness and anxiety. From this she was soon relieved by the Emperor, who, in the kindest manner told her, without enquiring the crime of the parent, he pardoned it, be it what it might, for the sake of such a daughter. He then gave her 2,000 roubles, and presented her to the Empress, who gave her 300 roubles, and settled 200 roubles a-year pension on her for life, with permission for herself and family to live where they pleased. The Dowager Empress has ordered her picture to be taken, which will soon get into the print shops. I will take care to get you a good copy. Her name is Praskovy Gregorioa Lupulova, which in English means Pauline, daughter of Gregory Lupulova. She had on a grey calico gown, with long sleeves, and full tops, like the English, a large black crape handkerchief on her neck, with a chaplet of beads and cross—all of which were given her at the convent near Moscow. On her head was a white muslin handkerchief, twisted carelessly round, and the ends tied under the chin. She has a very soft, pleasing countenance, but not handsome. So much interest has her story excited in St. Petersburg, and the particular notice taken of her by the Imperial family, it is become quite the rage to entertain her. The poor girl's head will be turned; she goes from one nobleman's house to another, staying a week, or sometimes longer, at each. General Koutousoff has bespoken her, and she comes to us in about a month."

Letter the Second.

"Pauline is with us. I find her very amiable, and much better informed than could be supposed possible in one born and brought up in the deserts of Siberia. She seems very grateful and affectionate, which is made known more by manner than words, for she only speaks Russ, and that so badly we can hardly understand each other. She is admitted to Madame Koutousoff's table, to which the General himself leads her every day, but kept strict fast all Lent, not even eating fish. Her father, I find, was employed in the palace of the late Empress Catherine, in the menial office of looking after the fires, when he contrived to steal a large quantity of plate, for which he was banished. Madame Cottin's 'Elizabeth' is just brought me, in French. I told Pauline it was founded upon her adventures, and

translated the heads of the story to her. She laughed heartily, and said, 'A poor girl like me made into such a fine story!' She is considered in a very bad state of health, the effects of her sufferings. A very large subscription has been collected for her, but I fear she will not long enjoy it. She has sent for her parents, and intends meeting them at Catherinburg, and retiring to a convent. I enquired if she meant to embrace a religious life. She smiled and said, 'No; her gratitude to God and the Emperor was unbounded, and would be as long as she lived. There was no necessity for her to be a nun, to pray at stated times; her heart was in constant voluntary prayer, and God knew with what sincerity.'"

LETTER THE THIRD.

"I am quite vexed to find the Dowager Empress has strictly forbidden Pauline's picture to be made public. She has had one placed in her own cabinet, and a copy sent to each of the Imperial family; but I am determined you shall have a likeness of her, as on her return she has promised we shall see her again before she finally settles; and a friend who visits here, a very eminent artist, has assured me he will take it for me."

LETTER THE FOURTH.

"I am happy in the opportunity of Mr. Gordon's return to England, to send you the promised sketch of the interesting Pauline. It is an excellent likeness, and I hope you will receive it safely. You will see by her dress she is now in a convent. It is situated in Lower Novogorod. Her father and mother are pensioners with her, in the same house. She says she feels herself the happiest creature in the world."

"She is since dead; supposed to have entirely broken her constitution by fatigue and anxiety, at the early age of twenty-five."

LOTTIE'S "YES."

By C. E. Meetkerke.

"TWO strings to one's bow may be a good thing, but this is more than a joke, my lady."

So said Sir Henry, taking out a cigar, that he might be prepared, without any signs of a hasty and inglorious retreat, to close a conversation which he thought might possibly be stormy.

"More than a joke?" enquired Lady Davenant, hardly raising her eyes from her work.

"Yes, more than a joke," repeated Sir Henry. "Of course, you stand up for him: of course, everything that Harry does is right; but does he think that he can marry both those girls?"

"Both? He proposed to Lottie Craven yesterday."

"I know that very well, but he has been proposing to Eve Dacre every day for the last ten years."

"A boy and girl attachment," returned Lady Davenant: "there has never been any question of love between Eve and Harry."

"Very probably," said Sir Henry: "but there may be a great deal of love and no question at all in the matter."

"I wonder you are not pleased: it is such an excellent match for Harry. Miss Craven has at least six thousand a-year, and Eve will not have six hundred."

"Six thousand a-year is all very well," replied Sir Henry, "although if I were to put myself in the market I should like to go for a rounder sum than that! I should very likely be pleased if I could feel sure that he was not breaking the heart of a girl who is as near an angel as any woman can be, and was not behaving even worse to another."

"Worse to Lottie Craven?" cried Lady Davenant, slightly warming at this.

"Yes, worse to Lottie Craven; for how can a man possibly behave worse to a woman than when he tells her that he loves her better than anything in the world, whilst in real truth he loves nothing about her except her money?"

"Harry is not mercenary," said Lady Davenant, in a tone full of reproach. "He may have faults, but he is not mercenary."

"Still, if a younger son means to do nothing but lounge about all his days, he is bound to marry an heiress."

"I never knew you so cynical! He has his profession. He does not mean to do nothing."

"The profession of a guardsman is hardly lucrative; at any rate, I would rather that he stuck to his colours."

"What do you mean by sticking to his colours?"

Lady Davenant understood perfectly well what her husband meant, but the moment he went straight to the point, as was his custom whenever he thought it worth while to see that there was a point, she was in the habit of exercising the power which she possessed of bringing him to punishment in the shape of explanation. Sir Henry was a foxhunter, and foxhunters would rather take any sort of leap than the mental one which lands them at the door of an explanation.

It was after dinner however, and the baronet was wound up to the mark, so he replied stoutly :

" I mean this, that I would rather he gave up his horses, and his cigars, and all the rest of it, to spend his days honestly with the woman he loves, than that he should vere round and give himself up body and soul in exchange for all the guineas that ever were coined."

Lady Davenant went on working assiduously. There is a peculiar ring in pure unadulterated truth which it is difficult to silence with shams, and Sir Henry Davenant was allowed to go on.

" I confess I am disappointed in Harry, and I wish Dacre had been able to come down from the clouds and settle his ward's affairs before all this mystification had set in. However, he may yet find out his mistake. He is possibly deceiving himself : he pretends to think he has done the right thing, and what everybody expected of him."

" But so he has," said Lady Davenant, relieved to find that the storm was blowing over. " He has behaved very sensibly. It would be exceedingly foolish of him to marry Eve. It would be a perpetual struggle. Harry would have to exchange into another regiment— might be sent abroad, to some outlandish place with a shocking climate! It would be dreadful!"

" Very well," said Sir Henry ; " then I suppose he has done the right thing." And he lighted his cigar, with a sigh of relief that he had said what he had intended to say, and that the discussion was over.

But Lady Davenant, left alone, was by no means so easy in her mind as she had determined it was best that she should appear to be. Harry's cause was his mother's cause, and it was self-evident that a good match was more to be desired than a bad one. Her darling would be happier in the long run, even if he had to give up the romance of his youth, by avoiding the cares, anxieties, and self-imposed but imperative sacrifices entailed by a limited income.

She was not, however, so sure that he had done what was right. She said so : she had told herself so ; but when it is found necessary to teach oneself with insistance that a thing is absolutely right, there may be room for doubting if it be not absolutely wrong. Harry was very dear to her, but Eve was almost equally as dear. Mr. Dacre had buried his paternal love under so heavy a mass of learning that it never appeared on the surface in any available shape. He had found more consolation for a bereaved life in his study

than in his nursery, and Lady Davenant had taken to her heart the motherless girl, and thought she loved her as she loved her own. It would have been terrible to her to have to acknowledge that she was ready to sacrifice Eve for an imaginary advantage to Harry: and at this point her reflections became so entangled and so altogether unsatisfactory that she was not sorry when they were interrupted by the chief subject of them. The suggestion that her boy had been led to act in any way which could be supposed to fall short of the high ideal which was, as she asserted to herself, her standard for him, was very grievous to her; but how was it possible that she could look upon him, as he threw himself down by her side, and listen to any such suggestion? Handsome, charming, and a thoroughly spoilt child, who could find fault with Harry Davenant? For a moment it occurred to her that her husband had seen deeper into the matter than any of them. What if that gay and graceful air, those tender tricks and flatteries of manner, those outward shows of all that seemed most promising within, had been the means of robbing Eve Dacre of that which is a woman's best possession, "the quiet of her thoughts"? And what if she herself had been the means of bringing about a state of things which they might all eventually have to regret? But she had to throw aside such meditations, and to answer Harry's somewhat questioning eyes with a smile.

"Why are you come back so soon? I thought you were spending the evening at the vicarage."

"Yes, so I was; but I got bored—and so I came away."

"Bored, Hal?"

"Yes; Butler had been asked to meet me, and was full of congratulations. Really, Eve should have a little more tact. It is so extremely annoying to be congratulated; and what with his 'complementary colours' and his 'symmetrical arrangements,' he is decidedly a bore. One would think, too, by the way in which the girls look up to him, that he was the inventor of the rainbow, and the composer of a zonale pelargonium."

"Harry!"

"I was beginning to lose my temper, so I left them."

"But Mr. Butler thinks of nobody but Eve; he never listens to anybody else. How came he to engross Lottie?" This was said pertinently and with intention.

"I don't know that he engrossed Lottie; I don't know that he thinks of nobody but Eve."

"My dear boy! everybody sees that."

"Everybody is very often very much mistaken."

"There is no mistake about that. I only wish Eve was not so indifferent: although perhaps, after all, it is better so. It would be an imprudent match."

"Imprudent! by Jove, yes!"

"And he is quite aware that he has no hope; he even said as

much to me, and that she had brought him a happiness beyond all bounds, in teaching him that it was in his nature to love in an ideal and perfect way: that it was a benefit which no one else could have bestowed upon him."

"What bosh!"

"He said he was passionately grateful to her."

"The man's an ass!"

"No, indeed: he spoke very reasonably. I felt for him so much. He said it was better for him not to be happy: that he would hardly have worked so well if all had gone smoothly with him. He might not have sympathised so much with suffering: he might have become self-centred."

"I can almost hear him! They were deep in symbols and the thing signified when I left them: quoting some German story: a water-witch or nymph which was, he declared, 'the pure Eve of the early world.' He put me in a passion!"

"Undine, I suppose."

"Yes; Lottie said it was an allegory, and then Butler began raving in verse and talked some nonsense about love being content to write his own name on desert sands, or some such idiotic stuff. They would not be persuaded to stir, because he had been visiting the sick and was supposed to be knocked up. He graciously allowed himself to be made much of, took a dozen cups of tea, and said it was better to wear out than to rust out: which astonishingly novel and original sentiment Eve applauded. They put me out of all patience! Girls are very well when they don't make fools of themselves; but my darling mother, who is always the same, always lovely, always sympathetic, always reasonable, is worth a dozen of them!"

"A very pretty sentiment for a lover," laughed Lady Davenant.

Lottie Craven, the cause of what Sir Henry Davenant had called "all this mystification," having been left, with her unencumbered six thousand a-year, to the guardianship of Mr. Dacre, it was forced upon him to take some heed of his duties: the more especially when, tired of waiting for his advice, she had come down in person to the vicarage. But he, being what Hamlet called himself, a "John-a-dreams," was apt to set aside the obnoxious pressure of business matters, and, although he spent more time than ever in his library, and even went so far as to hint that a visit to the law courts might be imposed upon him, he took no further steps in the settlement of her affairs. He became, it is to be admitted, very deeply read in the liabilities of trustees and exceedingly well versed in the details of new classes of rights and immunities, but days passed into weeks, and weeks into months, and still the business was far from being definitely arranged; nothing was settled; books were consulted; much was said and written and thought upon the statements, discrepancies, enigmas of the law. The guardian and ward were on the

best of terms, and consulted daily together, but nothing was done. There are still some blessed spots left in the world where nothing ever is done.

During this time Captain Davenant, enjoying his long leave, had thrown himself upon the mercy of the vicarage. The girls must take compassion upon him, they must save him from the demon of ennui, or really something desperate would happen. The appeal had not been made in vain, and the long summer days had not apparently been felt by him to be utterly unendurable.

Eve alone, he admitted, might not have always been equal to the occasion, she might not always have been able to keep him amused; but with Lottie to assist, Lottie who was gay, Lottie who sang charmingly, the young guardsman was amazed to find that he had almost forgotten what it was to be bored. And then naturally the question suggested itself, why should he not endeavour to secure this companion who was clever and gay and never let him be bored? It was not often that Harry Davenant gave himself up to any very distinct current of thought, but in this matter it had become necessary for him to think. He put it to himself whether he would be justified in throwing away six thousand a-year if it could be had for asking: surely such negligence would be inexcusable. It was not as if there were any drawbacks. In this case everything went together: good looks, money, talent. She was, perhaps, rather too talented: he feared she might be considered too talented; she said sharp things; she read hard books; that was against her; but he could soon cure her of that—it was the outcome of having nothing to do, and at all events he could forbid her to talk about them. There was nothing in the world, he thought, so objectionable as a woman who imagined herself, or who was imagined by others to be blue.

Then she was evidently very fond of him. She had been in good society and knew a man of the world from a common sort of man. She never spoke to the curate when he was by; that showed her sense and her discrimination. Now, the curate was a thorn in Harry's side. He did not acknowledge even to himself that it was so; and their occupations, their views and hopes of life, were so widely separate that there appeared no possible reason for jealousy or jar: but still Harry never possessed his soul in peace in the presence of Lionel Butler. Infinitely as he considered himself his superior, he was ill at ease before him, and had to acknowledge that he never did anything well when Butler was in the room.

The curate was a self-made man; there was not a shadow of conventionality about him—industrious from necessity, studious both from necessity and choice, without pretension of any kind, simple, unworldly, absolutely honest. And this man, who was sensibly deficient in the ornamental qualities upon which Harry Davenant especially prided himself, had the effect of dispossessing him of the very charms by which he held himself to excel; of making him see

himself as he really was, becoming a sort of conscience to him; than which there is hardly a more direct road to aversion.

Lottie Craven was always ready to support Harry: she endorsed his views and opinions; they were the views and opinions of society; and when the curate came down with a heavy hand upon some fashionable fallacy, and shattered a sophism, all unconscious of discourtesy, she would rebuke him by her silence or lead him on to give voice to his unvarnished creeds in a still more ungainly manner. Harry thought very highly of her for this: he liked pride in a girl: he liked that she should look as by right over the heads of men who were obliged to work; and that, with a certain subtle difference of manner, she should make it understood that the companion of her choice was the man to whom belonged by birth and by design the gifts of fortune. One may approve of the bee, but the butterfly is naturally to be preferred.

It was different with regard to Eve: she was less well versed in social distinctions, and showed plainly enough that the curate's society was pleasing to her. She deferred to his opinion, she sought for instruction at his hands, she entered into his views, carried out his plans, obeyed his instructions. Eve! When Harry's thoughts turned in that direction they became harassing to him, and so he set them aside and returned to the contemplation of Lottie, her pretty looks, her manners, her brightness, her six thousand a-year; which contemplation naturally brought him in due course of time to a proposal, very eloquently, very confidently made, and to which Lottie said "Yes," in a grave, considerate way, without blushes or tears, or any girlish nonsense of any kind.

He liked that; as he afterwards assured himself, any vehement demonstration of tenderness would have been unpleasing to him. "Yes," with serene, somewhat penetrating and questioning eyes raised to his face; almost with a smile; with a little hesitation as to the words, a little quiver of the lips; with a decided withdrawal of the hand he had taken in his; but still "Yes."

Friendship is rare amongst women; that supreme confidence which a woman feels in a man who is her friend is not often felt by one woman towards another: but there had been a great deal of this confidence, a great deal of that which is very like friendship, between Eve Dacre and Lottie Craven until the day when Harry Davenant proposed to Lottie, and Lottie said "Yes." And then a great gulf opened between them. Not that any such division was acknowledged in so many words. Eve might have accused her friend of having robbed her of a treasure which had been all her own, of having stolen in upon her with gentle words, tender professions and loving eyes, and robbed her; of having entered into the secret chamber of her heart to scatter its most precious possessions. And Lottie might have replied that to have refused the faithless lover of her friend would not have rendered him less faithless; and that there was no

cruelty on her part, except of that necessary sort which is better than kindness, since there can be nothing in the world more to be dreaded than a fool's paradise. But Eve brought no such accusation, therefore Lottie had no need to put forward any defence.

It takes a long time to believe in misfortune when the storm comes, and "tears up all the roses from the garden." A great confusion of mind is one of its first effects. Eve knew that she had received a blow under which it was next to impossible that she should stand upright; but she did not feel sure that she had any right to fall down. Her love for Harry Davenant had grown with her growth; but she could not say that she had been asked to bestow it upon him, or that she had been illused when he flung it away. It had been a part of herself, and now it had gone from her. But what right had she to complain? She had reposed no particular confidence in Lottie, and could hardly assert that she had been betrayed. Yet she could not help being aware that her secret had come into the possession of her friend at a very early period of their intimacy. Such being the case, there could be no doubt that an act of treason had been virtually committed, for which, although there might be no form of accusation, there could also be no excuse and no forgiveness.

She now reflected with a shudder on the hypocrisy of her rival: that whenever they had spoken together of Harry Davenant, Lottie had been at much pains to disparage him. The good looks which everybody else combined to praise had been depreciated by Lottie; she had even averred that Lionel Butler's more reflective face, though sinning against perfection, was altogether better pleasing to her. She had been very strong upon the subject of Harry's faults: so strong, that her want of sympathy, or what Eve was now obliged to acknowledge was her pretended want of sympathy, upon this dearest of all subjects, had prevented that cordial response on her own part to Lottie's tender expressions of affection which Lottie had a right to expect. She had often reproached herself for the coldness of her own temperament, and had hardly understood the enthusiastic devotion which Lottie expressed for her. She remembered with painful distinctness one especial conversation in which Lottie had extolled the merits of friendship, had defined its duties, privileges, and joys: how far superior she had declared it to be in its truth, its tenderness, and abnegation, to the selfish and delusive passion of love. What scheming—what unreality—what hypocrisy, had there not been in all this! and how utterly she had been deceived! She had lost both lover and friend, and could only cover up her grief and bear herself so bravely that she might not incur the danger of compassion or the humiliation of sympathy.

Some days passed by, and the calm had set in after the storm. People had fallen into their places, but still there was an undercurrent of convulsion, and the atmosphere was not so serene as it appeared.

Whilst their elders sat still, not exactly waiting, but still not unprepared for change, the chief actors in the play were anxious and uneasy, and felt as if beset by a feverish desire to engage in some sort of a conflict, or at least a skirmish, to relieve the torpid tumult in the air. In the attainment of this object Harry Davenant was more successful than the others. By way of displaying a due devotion to his bride elect, he found it necessary to exalt her with an overwhelming exhibition of preference. She rode, she sang, she talked, she dressed better than any other woman; more especially better than Eve, his early friend and companion. He found fault with Eve; she was out of sorts, she was looking wretchedly ill: a woman ought to be always bright, always gay, always with fresh roses on her cheeks! Why should a woman ever be ill? She had always time to take care of herself, and never had any worry. She never need have any worry if she did not make grievances. A man who drives himself to be cruel to the woman he loves, has penetrated to the very depths of one of the strongest possibilities of his nature. With every new pang which he inflicts a new sense of triumph is born within him, and the weaker the mind of the man the stronger the passion becomes, and the more complete the consciousness of satisfaction. But the sport is not enjoyable to the lookers-on, and if Eve thought he was right although he was cruel, and acknowledged that she was out of sorts: that she neither rode nor sang nor spoke with spirit, did not even dress so well as she used to do, or else the colours did not become her so well: there was a deep sympathy gathering round her, and if silent participation in her suffering could have assuaged it she would not have lacked consolation.

Lionel Butler, in his anxiety for them all, forgot to grieve for himself. In fact, he had put himself altogether out of the question. Eve was unhappy: that was the chief thing. The friendship between her and Lottie was evidently broken; the growing coldness between them was apparent; not so much on Lottie's side, whose looks followed her friend with a regretful tenderness, which Lionel thought became her better than any of her looks; but Eve avoided her, and was too honest to affect a kindness she no longer felt. Was it possible, he asked himself, that Lottie could have been anything less than loyally true to this flower and pearl among women? Then, again, would Lottie herself be happy with Harry Davenant? Was he a man to make a woman of sense and feeling perfectly happy? and was he not also endangering his own peace of mind? Was he not sacrificing the best feelings of his heart to mercenary considerations? The kindly curate trembled for them all, but was powerless to guide or to assist. It would have been useless and impertinent in him to interfere, but had he been sure that he could be of use he would have risked the impertinence.

II.

THERE came an evening when our dramatis personæ had dined together and adjourned to the garden. The engaged lovers, supposing that no less could be expected from them, sauntered away, but they sauntered lingeringly and cast backward looks at the little party they left. Sir Henry and Mr. Dacre sat apart, the murmur of their voices and the scent of their cigars just within range of perception. Lady Davenant, with her work of many colours, presented a refreshing picture of domestic tranquillity, and Eve and the curate were together, conversing; they were always conversing, Harry had affirmed.

The rest after a harassing day was solacing to Eve; her face wore something of its once habitual serenity, and Lionel Butler thought that the poet's picture of Mary Ashburnham described her well. "Angels in the old poetic philosophy have such forms: a temple dedicated to Heaven, and, like the Pantheon at Rome, lighted only from above, and earthly passions in the form of gods no longer there, but the sweet and thoughtful faces of the Saints: so that he who had a soul to comprehend hers must of necessity love her, and having once loved her could love no other woman ever more."

He could not help uttering the words more than half aloud, and Lady Davenant asked if he were quoting poetry.

"Only the best prose."

"Hyperion," said Eve. "A book which unsettles one; whenever I open it I want to go to Germany."

"Go to Marburg!" exclaimed Lionel, "and spend a day in the church; it is celebrated for its pure and perfect architecture. The pointed arches of the nave are exquisite."

"I would rather go to Heidelberg and lie all day upon the Castle Hill."

"You would enjoy the paintings and the sculpture," continued Lionel; he would wait patiently, but was not easily turned by an unsympathetic remark. "They bear about them the simple and tender charm of early Christian art, and there is a statue of Elizabeth of Hungary holding in her right hand the model of a church whilst giving alms to a cripple at her feet."

"You have got the guide-book by heart," said Eve, laughing.

"I know the place well," replied Lionel, undisturbed; "the stones of the chapel where her relics were deposited are worn away by the steps of pilgrims."

"But her ashes were strewn to the winds, and her history reads more like that of a mad woman than of a saint," said Eve.

"She was a mistaken martyr," he replied, "and the just limits of self-sacrifice are hard to define."

"Lottie thinks that self-sacrifice is everything," said Eve, reflectively. "She hardly believes in any sort of affection that is not proved by some extreme act of devotion; at least, she says so."

"I should hardly think Miss Craven likely to act up to her theory," returned Lionel; "but one ought not to judge: one can never be sure."

Then Eve got up as if endeavouring to shake off some irritating thought. Lionel got up too, and the lovers in the distance saw them wandering away. "I wish Eve would take compassion upon him," said Lottie.

"Would what?" exclaimed Harry. The vehement manner and the angry flush which rose hotly to his face were not lost upon Lottie.

"You think it a bad match for Eve," she said; "but he is a good man."

"In the highest degree poor and pious!"

"You are no judge, being so prejudiced."

"Prejudiced?" (very warmly). "Why should I be prejudiced?"

Lottie looked up with a smile, which was not altogether pleasant to Harry Davenant. He was beginning to distrust Lottie's smiles. A sudden turn brought the divergent couples together. "You were interrupted the other day in your criticism on Undine," Eve was saying.

"Yes: I wanted you to see that Undine is evidently a spirit," replied Lionel; "not the soulless daughter of rivers and floods, but the spirit of beauty, worshipped in all ages, however little comprehended—a gift and a revelation, and born of water."

"Out of your depth again," broke in Harry, with something less than his usual urbanity. "You both deserve to be drowned in your rivers and your floods! Pray take a turn with me, and stop moralizing," he continued, placing Eve's hand within his arm. "I think it must be all these inductions and inferences and disputations which make you look so wretchedly pale."

There was a curious mixture of amusement and regret in Lottie's eyes as they passed out of sight. "I hardly know what you think about it, Mr. Butler," she said, turning towards him, "but I am very, very sorry."

"Sorry for yourself, or for Miss Dacre, or for both?" asked Lionel.

"I have not thought much of myself," replied Lottie, "but I would lay down my life for Eve."

Lionel looked at her steadily for a few moments; then he took her hand and pressed it very warmly in both his own.

It was quite an hour before Eve came back; she returned alone and paler than ever. Attempting to make some apology for her delay, Lottie stopped her and whispered lightly, "Lovers are proverbially laggards."

"There were no lovers, Lottie," said Eve.

"No lovers?" repeated Lottie, drawing Eve into the study, and closing the door as if to prevent her escape. "Then I think you hardly know the meaning of the word! But seriously, it is a pity that

Captain Davenant cannot bring himself to be more reasonable: he has tried very hard." Eve remaining mute, she went on. "You are puzzled? you don't understand? Well, there has been too much darkness between us: let it all be clear now."

"Oh Lottie! how can it be clear?"

"Why not? In the first place, as Harry Davenant is to be my husband, I desire to hear exactly what passed when he marched off with you in that majestic manner: I must know every word he said to you, and every word you said to him."

"I cannot—I must not; do not ask me!"

"But if I insist upon it?" said Lottie gravely.

"Pray, pray do not: you do not know how wretched you are making me!"

"Yes, I do; but it will soon be over: you are having a tooth out which has ached for a long time, but is never going to ache any more. You will not confess? not a word? Well, then, I must try to guess what passed. In the first place, Captain Davenant took upon himself to object to your tête-à-tête with 'that fellow Lionel Butler. It was,' he declared, 'unusual—unheard of—undignified! he would not allow it!' You are not easily roused, but you were roused at this, and you said that he had no right to dictate to you, that he had lost all right! Is not this somewhere near the mark?"

Eve smiled, a little faint wintry smile, and Lottie proceeded.

"He 'wondered what you could possibly see in Lionel Butler—unpolished, uncivilised—a perfect Goth—that neither of you understood the rules of good society!—you did not seem to be aware what was correct and what was not!'—so on, ad infinitum; and then you turned upon him. Did you turn upon him, Eve?"

"Lottie, I think you must have heard every word."

"But I haven't done yet. You conquered him—you shamed him—you brought him to your feet, and he forgot that there was such a person in the world as Lottie! He declared that it was you he loved—and that he was jealous, furiously jealous! But *you* did not forget me, Eve! you were true as steel to your friend, and you left him—left him in his passion and his grief and his remorse, without daring to give one look behind!"

Eve only answered with her tears, and Lottie went on. "And now for *my* confession! Balzac says that a woman's friendship is much better worth having than her love. I gave you all mine, and was romantic enough to wish to prove it by an act of self-immolation, which everybody except yourself would have understood. Your love for Harry Davenant perplexed and troubled me. Self-satisfied and shallow, he was, as I imagined, carelessly and arrogantly trifling with your deep affection, and I made up my mind that no sacrifice could be too great whereby to force you into seeing him, not in the colours of your fancy, but in his own true colours: man of the world, heartless and mercenary. No words of mine could have persuaded you of

this, but if he should be led to throw over a life's love without a struggle, even you must be convinced that he was worthless. It happened just as I desired, but he was not firm enough to carry it through. He is far more honest than I thought, and cannot disguise that he has come very nearly to hating me, and that he is truly, seriously, distractedly in love with you."

"Lottie! Lottie! what is it you mean?"

"I was in hopes you might have been won by a better man—a man that it would be a privilege to follow to the ends of the earth! but my plans have failed; I meant to have made a victim of myself for the good of you all: I have 'steered out in mid-sea by guidance of the stars,' so shipwreck was to be expected!"

"Dear, dear Lottie! How I have misunderstood you!"

Yes, indeed! and now what is to be done? Who is going to disentangle the skein, and to explain to Harry Davenant what Lottie Craven meant when she said "Yes"?

FIRST TIME AT CHURCH.

JUST three years old! and without a thought of all the rites and creeds;
Just three years old! and unconscious quite of the soul's unbounded needs;
Content it should draw what life it may from the food on which it feeds.

Just three years old! and brought to church to sit in the narrow pew,
And wonder at all the mysteries that rise before her view—
The noiseless movement down the aisle; the crowd, and the faces new;

The organ that peals out magic strains, though hidden from the sight;
The arches, and windows of pictured glass that tow'r to such a height;
The eagle that bears the Bible up; the choir in their robes of white.

To wonder and watch with childish awe that is more than mere surprise,
That seems to catch in the tones of earth some echo of the skies,
And reflects itself in the tender face, in the solemn, wide grey eyes,

Out of whose cloudless, dewy depths glimmers the earliest ray
Of the awak'ning love, whose dawn heralds a fuller day,
When, though the shadows may darker lie, the mists will melt away—

When the types shall find their antitypes, and the mysteries be made clear,
Though the deeper mysteries beyond will gather yet more near,
Awaiting a new and brighter dawn e'er they shall disappear.

Just three years old! and brought to church, though she can take no share
In the praises rising to God's high Throne, in confession or earnest pray'r;
Brought but to learn the reverence due to the awful Presence there.

Just three years old! with folded hands, she kneels when the others kneel;
And surely the blessing which falls on them may also gently steal
Over the innocent baby head, bent down in mute appeal.

EMMA RHODES.

M. ELLEN EDWARDS.

K AND E. TAYLOR.

THE ARGOSY.

MARCH, 1880.

THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

CHAPTER VII.

COMING TO DINNER.

MISS WINTER sat in her low chair by the window of her sitting-room in the north wing; for though she had abandoned her bed-room in that quarter, she still, on occasion, sat in that. A closed book lay on her lap, her chin was resting on the palm of one hand, and her eyes, to all appearance, were taking in for the thousandth time the features of the well-known scene before her. But in reality she saw nothing of it: her thoughts were elsewhere. This was Tuesday, the day fixed for Edward Conroy to dine at the Hall. How came it that his image—the image of a man whom she had seen but twice in her life—dwelt so persistently in her thoughts? She was vexed and annoyed with herself to find how often her mind went wandering off in a direction where—or so she thought—it had no right to go. She tried her hardest to keep it under control, to fill it with the occupations that had hitherto sufficed for its quiet contentment, but at the first unguarded moment it was away again, to bask in sunshine, as it were, till caught in the very act, and haled ignominiously back.

"Why must I be for ever thinking about this man?" she asked herself petulantly, as she sat this morning by the window, and a warm flush thrilled her even while the question was on her lips. She was ashamed to remember that even at church on Sunday morning she could not get the face of Edward Conroy out of her thoughts. The good Vicar's sermon had been more prosy and commonplace than usual, and do what she might, Ella could not fix her attention on it. She caught herself half a dozen times calling to mind what Conroy had said on Thursday, and wondering what he

would say on Tuesday. She had no intention of falling in love, either with him or with any other man; on that point she was firmly resolved. She and Maria Kettle had long ago agreed that they could be of more use in the world, of greater service to the poor, the sick, and the forlorn among their fellow creatures as single women than as married ones; and Ella, for her part, had no intention of letting any man carry her heart by storm.

Yet, after making all these brave resolutions, here she was, wondering and hesitating as to which dress she should wear, as she had never wondered or hesitated before; and when the clock struck eleven she caught herself saying, "In six more hours he will be here." Then she jumped up quickly with a gesture of impatience. She was the slave of thoughts over which she seemed to have no control. It was a slavery that to her proud spirit was intolerable. She could not read this morning. Her piano appealed to her in vain. Her crewel work seemed the tamest of tame occupations. She put on her hat and scarf, and, calling to Turco, set off at a quick pace across the park. Perhaps the fresh bracing air that blew over the sand-hills would cool the fever of unrest that was in her veins. Once she said to herself, "I wish he had never come to Heron Dyke!" But next moment a proud look came into her face and she said, "Why should I fear him more than any other?"

Ella Winter has hitherto been spoken of as though she were Mr. Denison's niece: she was in reality his grand-niece, being the grand-daughter of an only sister, who had died early in her married life, leaving one son behind her. This son, at the age of twenty-two, married a sister of Mrs. Carlyon, but his wedded life was of brief duration. Captain Winter and his wife both died of fever in the West Indies, leaving behind them Ella, their only child.

Mrs. Carlyon, a widow and childless, would gladly have adopted the orphan niece who came to her under these sad circumstances, but Squire Denison would not hear of such a thing. He had a prior claim to the child, he said, and she must go to him and be brought up under his care. He had no children of his own, and never would have any: Ella was the youngest and last descendant of the elder branch of the family, and Heron Dyke and all that pertained to it should be hers in time to come; provided always that he, Gilbert Denison, should live to see his seventieth birthday. He had loved his sister Lavinia as much as it was in his nature to love anyone; and her son, had he lived, would, in the due course of things, have been his heir. But he was dead, leaving behind him only this one poor little girl. To Gilbert Denison it seemed that Providence had dealt very hardly by him in giving him no male heir to inherit the family honours. He himself would have married years ago had he anticipated such a result.

For six hundred years the property had come down from male heir to male heir, but now at last the line of direct succession would

be broken. "If Ella had only been a boy!" he sighed to himself a thousand times: but Ella was that much more pleasing article—except from the heir-at-law point of view—a beautiful young woman, and nothing could make her anything else.

On the confines of the park, just as she was about to turn out of it, Ella met Captain Lennox, who was coming to call on the Squire. It was the first time Ella had seen him since her return from London, for the Captain had been again from home. He had aristocratic relatives, it was understood, in various parts of the kingdom, and was often away on visits to them for weeks together.

"You are looking better than you were that night at Mrs. Carlyon's," he remarked, as they stood talking.

"Am I?" returned Ella, a rosy blush suffusing her face—for the idea somehow struck her that Mr. Conroy's presence in the neighbourhood might be making her look bright.

"Very much so, I think. Mrs. Carlyon was not quite satisfied with your looks then. By-the-way," added the Captain after a pause, "has she recovered her jewels, that were lost that night?"

"No. She is quite in despair. I had a letter from her yesterday. You heard of the loss then, Captain Lennox?"

"I heard of it the following day. Ill news travels fast," he added lightly, noting Ella's look of surprise.

"How did you hear of it? I fancied you left London that day."

"No, the next. I heard of it from young Cleeve. He called on Mrs. Carlyon that morning, and came back in time for me and Bootle to see him off. Cleeve told us of the loss on his way to the station. It was a time of losses, Miss Winter. I lost my purse, and poor Bootle his watch—one he valued—the same night."

"Yes, Freddy told us of it later. He thought you were robbed in the street."

"I know he thought so. I did at first. But our losses were nothing compared with Mrs. Carlyon's jewels," continued Captain Lennox rapidly, as though he would cover his last words. "And the jewel case was found the next day; and the thief must have walked off with the trinkets in his pocket!"

"Just so. And they were worth quite three hundred pounds."

Captain Lennox opened his eyes. "Three hundred pounds! So much as that! I wonder how they were taken? By some light-handed fellow, I suppose, who contrived to find his way upstairs amid the general bustle of the house."

"No, we think not. The servants say it was not well possible for anyone to do that unnoticed; Aunt Gertrude thinks the same. And the servants are all trustworthy. It is a curious matter altogether."

Captain Lennox looked at her. "Surely you cannot suspect any of the guests?"

"It would be uncharitable to do that," was Ella's light answer.

But the keen-witted Captain noticed that she did not deny it more decisively.

"What a pity but the jewels had been safely locked up!" he exclaimed.

"The dressing-room, in which they were, was locked; at least, the key was turned—and who would be likely to intrude into it? Aunt Gertrude remembers that perfectly. She found Philip Cleeve lying on the sofa in her boudoir with a bad head-ache, and she went into the dressing-room to get her smelling-salts, unlocking the door to enter. Whether she relocked it is another matter."

"Did Cleeve notice whether anybody else went in, while he was lying there?"

"He thinks not, but he can't say for certain—we asked him that question the next morning. He fancies that he fell asleep for a few minutes: his head was very bad. Anyway, the jewels are gone, and Aunt Gertrude can get no clue to the thief, so it is hopeless to talk of it," concluded Ella, somewhat wearily. "How is your sister?"

"Quite well, thank you. Why don't you come and see her?"

"I will; I have been very busy since I came home. And tell her, please, that I hope she will come to see me. Good-bye for the present, Captain Lennox: you are going on to my uncle; perhaps you will not be gone when I get back; I shall not be long."

Ella tripped lightly on, Turco striding gravely beside her. Captain Lennox stood for a minute to look after her.

"I wonder," he muttered to himself, stroking his whiskers—a habit of his when he fell into a brown study—"whether it has crossed Mrs. Carlyon's mind to suspect Philip Cleeve?"

After all her vacillation, Ella went down to dinner that evening in a simple white dress. She could hardly have chosen one to suit her better; at least, so thought Mr. Conroy, when he entered the room. The dinner was not homely, as on the first occasion of his dining there; Ella had ordered it otherwise. It was served on some of the grand old family plate, not often brought to light; and the table was decorated with flowers from the Vicar's charming garden.

But what surprised Aaron more than anything else was to see his master dressed, and wearing a white cravat. He went about the house muttering, sotto voce, that there were no fools like old fools, and if these sort of extravagant doings were about to set in at the Hall—soups and fish and foreign kickshaws—it was time old-fashioned attendants went out of it. The Squire, in fact, had so thoroughly inoculated the old man with his own miserly ways, that for Aaron to see an extra shilling spent on what he considered unnecessary waste, was to set him grumbling for a day.

Whether it was that Ella had a secret dread of passing another evening alone with Conroy, or whether her intention was to render

the evening more attractive to him, she had, in any case, asked her uncle to allow her to invite the Vicar and Maria, Lady Cleeve and Philip, and Captain Lennox and his sister, to meet Mr. Conroy at dinner. But here the Squire proved obstinate. Not one of the people named would he invite, or indeed anyone else. "That young artist fellow is welcome to come and take pot-luck with us," he said, "but I'll have none of the rest. And why I asked him, I'm sure I don't know. There was something about him, I suppose, that took my fancy: though what right an invalid man like me has to have fancies, is more than I can tell."

Conroy seemed quite content to find himself the solitary guest. Ella was more reserved and silent than he had hitherto seen her, but he strove to interest her and melt her reserve; and after a time he succeeded in doing so. Once or twice, at first, when she caught herself talking to him with animation, or even questioning him with regard to this or the other, she suddenly subsided into silence, blushing inwardly as she recognised how futile her resolves and intentions had proved themselves to be. Conroy seemed not to notice these abrupt changes, and in a little while Ella would again become interested, again her eyes would sparkle, and eager questions tremble on her lips. Then all at once an inward sting would prick her, her lips would harden into marble firmness and silence. But these alternations of mood could not last for ever; and by-and-by the charm and fascination of the situation proved too much for her. "After this evening I shall probably never see him again," she pleaded to herself, as if arguing with some inward monitor. "What harm can there be if I enjoy these few brief hours?"

Mr. Denison was more than usually silent. Now and then, after dinner, he dozed for a few minutes in his huge leathern chair; and presently, as though he yearned to be alone, he suggested that Conroy and Ella should take a turn in the grounds.

Ella wrapped a fleecy shawl round her white dress and they set out. Traces of sunset splendour still lingered in the western sky, but from minute to minute the dying colours changed and deepened: saffron flecked with gold fading into sea-green, and that into a succession of soft opaline tints and pearly greys edged here and there with delicate amber: while in mid-sky the drowsy wings of darkness were creeping slowly down.

They walked on through the dewy twilight glades of the park. Conroy seemed all at once to have lost his speech. Neither of them had much to say, but to both the silence exhaled a subtle sweetness. There are moments when words seem a superfluity—almost an impertinence. To live, to breathe—to feel that beside you is the living, breathing presence of the one supremely loved, is all that you ask for. It is well, perhaps, that such sweetly dangerous moments come so seldom in a lifetime.

They left the park by a wicket, took a winding footway through

the plantation beyond, and reached the sand-hills, where they sat down for a few moments. Before them lay the sea, touched in mid-distance with faint broken bars of silvery light: for by this time the moon had risen, and all the vast spaces of the sky were growing brighter with her presence.

"How this scene will dwell in my memory when I am far away!" exclaimed Conroy at length.

"Are you going far away?" asked Ella, in a low voice.

"I received a letter from head-quarters this morning, bidding me hold myself in readiness to start for Africa at a few hours' notice."

"For Africa! That is indeed a long way off. Why should you be required to go to Africa?"

"The King of Ashantee is growing troublesome. We are likely before long to get from words to blows. War may be declared at any moment."

"And the moment war is declared you must be ready to start?"

"Even so. Wherever I am sent, there I must go."

"Yours is a dangerous vocation, Mr. Conroy. You run many risks."

"A few—not many. As for danger, there is just enough of it to make the life a fascinating one."

"Yes; if I were a man I don't think I could settle down into a quiet country gentleman. I should crave for a wider horizon, for a more adventurous life, for change, for——"

She ended abruptly. Once again her enthusiasm was running away with her. There was a moment's silence, and then she went on, laughing. "But I am content to be as I am, and to leave such wild rovings to you gentlemen! And now we must go back to my uncle, or he will wonder what has become of us."

Little was said during the walk back. Despite herself, Ella's heart sank at the thought of Conroy's going so far away. She asked, mentally and impatiently, what it could matter to her where he went. Had she not said twenty times that to-morrow all this would seem like a dream, and that in all likelihood she and Conroy would never meet again? What matter, then, so long as they did not see each other, whether they were separated by five miles or five thousand?

"Body o' me! I thought you were lost," exclaimed the Squire, as they re-entered the room. "Been for a ramble, eh? seen the sea! Fine evening for it. And when do you come down into this part of the country again, Mr. Sketcher?"

"That is more than I can say, sir. My movements are most erratic and uncertain."

"Mr. Conroy thinks it not unlikely he may be sent to Africa—to Ashantee," said Ella, a little ring of pathos in her voice.

"Ah—ah—nothing like plenty of change when you are young. Bad climate though, Ashantee, isn't it. You'll have to be careful

Yellow Jack doesn't lay you by the heels. He's a deuce of a fellow, out there, from all I've heard. Eh?"

"I must take my chance of that, sir, as other people have to do."

"You talk like a lad of spirit. Snap your fingers in the face of Yellow Jack, and ten to one he'll glance at you and pass you by. It's the tremblers he lays hold of first."

"Why should you be chosen, Mr. Conroy, for the posts of danger?" inquired Ella. "Cannot some one else share such duties?"

"Is it not possible that I may prefer such duties to any other? They do not suit everyone. As it happens, they suit me."

"Have you no mother or sister—who may fear your running into unnecessary dangers?"

"I have neither mother nor sister. I have a father: but he lets me do what seems right in my own eyes."

Mr. Denison took what for him was a very cordial leave of Conroy. "If I am alive when you come back," he said, as he held the younger man's hand in his for a moment, "do not forget that there will be a welcome for you at Heron Dyke. If I am not alive —then it won't matter, so far as I am concerned."

Ella took leave of Conroy at the door. Hardly more than a dozen words passed between them. "If you must go to Africa," she said, "I hope you will not run any needless risks."

"I will not. I promise it."

"We shall often think of you," she added, in a low voice.

"And I of you, be you very sure."

Her fingers were resting in his hand. He bent and pressed them to his lips, and—the next moment was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE LILACS.

NULLINGTON was a sleepy little town, standing a mile, or more, from Heron Dyke, and boasted of some seven or eight thousand inhabitants. The extension of the railway to Nullington was supposed to have made a considerable addition to its liveliness and bustle: but that could only be appreciated by those who remembered a still more sleepy state of affairs, when the nearest railway station was twenty miles away, and when the Mermaid coach seemed one of those institutions which must of necessity last for ever.

Nullington stood inland. Of late years a sort of suburb to the old town had sprung up with mushroom rapidity on the verge of the low sandy cliffs that overlooked the sea, to which the name of New Nullington had been given. Already New Nullington possessed terraces of lodging-houses, built to suit the requirements of visitors, and some good houses were springing up year by year. Several

well-to-do families, who liked "the strong sweet air of the North Sea," had taken up their residence there en permanence.

It was a pleasant walk from New Nullington along the footpath by the edge of the cliff, with the wheat-fields on one hand and the sea on the other; when you reached the lighthouse, the cliff began to fall away till it became merged in great reaches of shifting sand, which stretched southward as far as the eye could reach. Here at the junction of cliff and sand was the lifeboat station, while a few hundred yards inland, and partly sheltered from the colder winds by the sloping shoulder of the cliff, stood the little hamlet of Easterby. A few fishermen's cottages, a few labourers' huts—and they were little better than huts—an alehouse or two, a quaint old church which a congregation of fifty people sufficed to fill, and a few better-class houses scattered here and there, made up the whole of Easterby.

Easterby and New Nullington might be taken as the two points of the base of a triangle, with the sea for their background, of which the old town formed the apex. The distance of the latter was very nearly the same from both places. About half-way between Easterby and the old town of Nullington, you came to the lodge which gave access to the grounds and Hall of Heron Dyke.

On the other side of Nullington, on the London road, stood Homedale, a pretty modern-built villa, standing in its own grounds, the residence of Lady Cleeve and her son Philip.

Lady Cleeve had not married until late in life, and Philip was her only child. She had been the second wife of Sir Gunton Cleeve, a baronet of good family but impoverished means. There was a son by the first marriage, who had inherited the title and such small amount of property as came to him by entail. The present Sir Gunton was in the diplomatic service at one of the foreign courts. He and his step-mother were on very good terms. Now and then he wrote her a cheery little note of a dozen lines, and at odd times there came a little present from him, just a token of remembrance, which was as much as could be expected from so poor a man.

Lady Cleeve had brought her husband fifteen thousand pounds in all, the half of which only was settled on herself; and her present income was but three hundred and fifty pounds a year. The house, however, was her own. She kept two women servants, and lived of necessity a plain and unostentatious life; saving ever where she could for Philip's sake. That young gentleman, now two-and-twenty years old, was not yet in a position to earn a guinea for himself; though it was needful that he should dress well and have money to spend, for was he not the second son of Sir Gunton Cleeve?

For the last two years Philip had been in the office of Mr. Tiplady, the one architect of whom Nullington could boast, and who really had an extensive and high-class practice. Mr. Tiplady had known and respected Lady Cleeve for a great number of years; and, being

quite cognisant of her limited means, he had agreed to take Philip for a very small premium, but as yet did not pay him any salary. The opening was not an unpromising one, there being some prospect that Philip might one day succeed to the business, for the architect had neither chick nor child.

Another prospect was also in store for Philip—that he should marry Maria Kettle. The Vicar and Lady Cleeve, old and firm friends, had somehow come to a tacit notion upon the point years ago, when the children were playfellows together; and Philip and Maria understood it perfectly—that they were some day to make a match of it. It was not distasteful to either of them. Philip thought himself in love with Maria; perhaps he was so after a fashion; and there could be little doubt that Maria loved Philip with all her heart. And though she did not see her way clear to leave the parish as long as her father was vicar of it, she did admit to herself in a half-conscious way that if, in the far, very far-off future, she could be brought to change her condition, it would be for Philip Cleeve.

Midway between the old town and the new one, was The Lilacs; the pretty cottage ornée of which Captain Lennox and his sister, Mrs. Ducie, were the present tenants. The cottage was painted a creamy white, and had a verandah covered with trailing plants running round three sides of it. It was shut in from the highroad by a thick privet hedge and several clumps of tall evergreens. Flower borders surrounded the house, in which was shown the perfection of ribbon gardening, and the well-kept lawn was big enough for Badminton or lawn-tennis. There was no view from the cottage beyond its own grounds. It lay rather low, and was perhaps a little too much shut in by trees and greenery: all the same, it was a charming little place.

Here, on a certain evening in September, for the weeks have gone on, a pleasant little party had met to dine. There was the host, Captain Lennox. After him came Lord Camberley, a great magnate of the neighbourhood. The third was our old acquaintance, Mr. Bootle, with his eye-glass and his little fluffy moustache. Last of all came handsome Philip Cleeve, with his brown curly hair and his ever-ready smile. The only lady present was Mrs. Ducie.

Teddy Bootle had run down on a short visit to Nullington, as he often did. He and Philip had found Captain Lennox and Lord Camberley in the billiard-room of the Rose and Crown Hotel—Master Philip being too fond of idling away his hours, and just now it was a very slack time at the office. Lennox at once introduced Mr. Bootle to his lordship, and he condescended to be gracious to the little man, whose income was popularly supposed to be of fabulous extent. Philip he knew to nod to; but the two were not much acquainted. The Captain proposed that they should all go home and dine with him at The Lilacs, and he at once scribbled a note to his sister, Mrs. Ducie, that she might be prepared for their arrival.

Lord Camberley was a good-looking, slim-built, dark-complexioned man of eight-and-twenty. He had a small black moustache, his hair was cropped very short, and he was fond of sport as connected with the race-course. By his father's death a few months ago he had come into a fortune of nine thousand a year. He lived, when in the country, at Camberley Park, a grand old Elizabethan mansion about five miles from Nullington, where his aunt, the Honourable Mrs. Featherstone, kept house for him.

It was at the billiard-table that he and Lennox had first met. A billiard-table is like a sea voyage: it brings people together for a short time on a sort of common level, and acquaintanceships spring up which under other circumstances would never have had an existence. The advantage is that you can drop them again when the game is over, or the voyage at an end: though people do not always care to do that. In the dull little town of Nullington the occasional society of a man like Captain Lennox seemed to Lord Camberley an acquisition not to be despised. They had many tastes and sympathies in common. The Captain was always well posted up in the state of the odds; in fact, he made a little book of his own on most of the big events of the year. There were few better judges of the points of a horse or a dog than he. Then he could be familiar without being presuming: Lord Camberley, who never forgot that he was a lord, hated people who presumed. Lennox, in fact, was a "deuced nice fellow," as he more than once told his aunt. Meanwhile he cultivated his society a good deal: he could always drop him when he grew tired of him, and it was his lordship's way to grow tired of everybody before long.

Five minutes after they had assembled Margaret Ducie entered the room. Lord Camberley had seen her several times previously, but to Bootle and Philip she was a stranger. Her brother introduced them. There was perhaps a shade more cordiality in the greeting she accorded to Bootle than in the one she vouchsafed to Philip. Camberley the cynical, who was looking on, and who prided himself, with or without cause, on his knowledge of the sex, muttered under his breath, "She knows already which is the rich man and which the poor clerk. Lennox must have put her up to that."

Mrs. Ducie was a brunette. She had a great quantity of jet-black silky hair and large black liquid eyes. Her nose was thin, high-bred, and aquiline, and she rarely spoke without smiling. Her figure was tall and somewhat meagre in its outlines; but whether she sat, or stood, or walked, every movement and every pose was instinct with a sort of picturesque and unstudied grace. She dressed very quietly, and when abroad her almost invariable wear was a gown of some plain black material. But about that simple garment there was a style, a fit, a suspicion of something in cut or trimming, in the elaboration of a flounce here or the addition of a furbelow there, that to the observant mind hinted at the latest Parisian audacity and

of secrets which as yet were scarcely whispered beyond Mayfair. The ladies of Nullington and its neighbourhood could only envy and admire and imitate afar off.

Mrs. Ducie was one of those women whose age it is next to impossible to guess correctly. "She's thirty if she's a day," Lord Camberley had said to himself within five minutes of his introduction to her. "She can't possibly be more than three-and-twenty," was Philip Cleeve's verdict to-day. The truth, in all probability, lay somewhere between the two.

Whatever her age might be, Lord Camberley had a great admiration for Mrs. Ducie, but it was after a fashion of his own. He was thoroughly artificial himself, and rustic beauty, or simplicity, eating bread-and-butter in a white frock, had no charms for him. He liked a woman who had seen and studied the world of "men and manners;" and that Mrs. Ducie had travelled much, and seen many phases of life, he was beginning by this time to discover. He was on his guard when he first made her acquaintance, lest he might be walking into a matrimonial trap, artfully baited by herself and her brother, for Lord Camberley was a mark for anxious mothers and daughters: not but that he felt himself quite capable of looking after his own interests on that point. Still, however wide-awake a man may believe himself to be, it is always best to be wary in this crafty world; and very wary he was the first three or four times he visited The Lilacs. He was not long, however, in perceiving that, whatever matrimonial designs Margaret Ducie might or might not have elsewhere, she was without any as far as he was concerned; and from that time he felt at ease in the cottage.

Captain Lennox's little dinners were thoroughly French in style and cookery. They were good without being over elaborate. Camberley's idea was that the pretty widow, despite her white and delicate hands, was oftener in the kitchen than most people imagined. When dinner was over the gentlemen adjourned to the verandah to smoke their cigars and sip their coffee; while in the drawing-room, the French windows of which were open to the garden, lighted only by one shaded lamp, Margaret sat and played in a minor key such softly languishing airs, chiefly from the old masters, as accorded well with the September twilight and the far niente feeling induced by a choice dinner.

Philip Cleeve felt like a man who dreams and is yet awake. Never before had he been in the company of a woman like Mrs. Ducie. There was a seductive witchery about her, such as he had no previous knowledge of. It was not that she took more notice of him than of anyone else; it maybe that she took less; but he fell under the influence of that subtle magnetism, so difficult to define, and yet so very evil in its effects, which some women exercise over some men, perhaps without any wish or intention on their part of doing so. In the case of Philip it was a sort of mental intoxication, delicious and

yet with a hidden pain in it, and with a vague underlying sense of unrest and dissatisfaction for which he was altogether unable to account.

After a time somebody proposed cards—probably it was Camberley—and as no one objected they all went indoors.

"What are we going to play?—whist?" queried Lennox while the servant was arranging the table.

"Nothing so slow as whist, I hope," said his lordship. "A quiet hand at 'Nap' would be more to my taste."

"How say you, gentlemen? I suppose we all play that vulgar but fascinating game?" said the Captain.

"I know a little of it," answered Bootle.

"I have only played it once," said Philip.

"If you have played once, it's as good as having played it a thousand times," said Camberley, dogmatically. "I'm not over brilliant at cards myself, but I picked up Napoleon in ten minutes."

"Shilling points, I suppose?" said Lennox.

Camberley shrugged his shoulders but said nothing, and they all sat down.

There was an arched recess in the room, fitted with an ottoman. It was Mrs. Ducie's favourite seat. Here she sat now, engaged on some piece of delicate embroidery, looking on, and smiling, and giving utterance to an occasional word or two between the deals, but not interrupting them.

Philip Cleeve, notwithstanding that he was less conversant with the game than his companions, and that the black eyes of Mrs. Ducie would persist in coming between him and his cards—he could see her from where he sat, almost without a turn of his head—was very fortunate in the early part of the evening, carrying all before him. He found himself, at the end of an hour and a half's play, a winner of close on three sovereigns; which to a narrow pocket seems a considerable sum.

"This is too sleepy!" cried Camberley at last. "Can't we pile up the agony a bit, eh, Lennox?"

"I'm in your hands," said the Captain.

"What say you, Mr. Bootle?" queried his lordship. "Shall we turn our shillings into half-crowns? That will afford a little more excitement, eh?"

"Then a little more excitement let us have by all means," answered good-natured Freddy, who cared not whether he lost or won.

But now Philip's luck seemed at once to desert him. What with the extra wine he had taken, and the glamour cast over him by the proximity of Mrs. Ducie, his judgment became entirely at fault. In half an hour he had lost back the whole of his earnings; a little later still, his pockets were empty. It is true he only had two sovereigns about him at starting, so that his loss was not a heavy one; but it was quite heavy enough for him. He was hesitating what he should

do next—whether borrow of Bootle or Lennox—when all at once he remembered that he had money about him. In the course of the day he had collected an account amounting to twenty pounds, due to Mr. Tiplady, and it was still in his possession. He felt relieved at once. There was a chance of his winning back what he had lost. With a hand that shook a little he poured out some wine and water at the side table and then sat down to resume his play.

When the clock on the chimney-piece chimed eleven, Lord Camberley threw down his cards, saying he would play no more, and Philip Cleeve found himself with a solitary half-sovereign left in his pocket.

He got up, feeling stunned and giddy, and stepped out through the French window into the verandah. Here he was presently joined by the rest. Lennox thrust a cigar into his hand, and they all lighted up. The night was sultry; but after the warmth of the drawing-room such fresh air as there was seemed welcome to all of them. They went slowly down the main walk of the garden towards the little fish-pond at the end, Camberley and Mrs. Ducie, for she had strolled out too, being a little behind the others.

"I am going to drive my drag to the Agricultural Show at Norwich next Tuesday," said his lordship to her. "Lennox has promised to go. May I ask you if you will honour me with your company on the box seat on the occasion?"

"Who is going besides yourself and Ferdinand?" she rejoined.

"Captain Maudesley, and Pierpoint. Sir John Fenn will probably pack himself inside with his gout."

"But the other ladies—who are they?"

"Um—well, to tell you the truth, I had not thought about asking any other lady."

"Ah! Then, I'm not sure that I should care to go with you, Lord Camberley. Five gentlemen and one lady—that would never do."

"Let me beg of you to reconsider ——"

"Pray do nothing of the kind. I would rather not."

"I am awfully sorry," said his lordship in something of a huff. "Confound this cigar! And confound such old-fashioned prudish notions!" he added to himself. "I'd not have thought it of her."

She walked back, after saying a pleasant word or two, and fell into conversation with Philip Cleeve. He seemed distrait. She thought he had taken enough champagne, and felt rather sorry for the young fellow.

"Do you never feel dull, Mrs. Ducie," he asked, "now that you have come to live among the sand-hills?"

"Oh no. The people I have been introduced to here are all very nice and kind; and then I have my ponies, you know; and there's my music, and my box from Mudie's once a month; so that I have not much time for ennui. My tastes are neither very æsthetic nor very elevated, Mr. Cleeve."

"They are at least agreeable ones," answered Philip.

As Philip Cleeve walked home a war of feelings was at work within him, such as he had never experienced before. On the one hand there was the loss of Mr. Tiplady's twenty pounds: which must be made good to-morrow morning. He turned hot and cold when he thought of what he had done. He knew it was wrong, dishonourable—what you will. How he came to do it he could not tell—just as we all say when the apple's eaten and the bitter is left. He must ask his mother to make good the loss; but it would never do to tell her the real facts of the case. He should not like *her* to think him dishonourable—and she was not well, and it would vex her terribly. He must go to her with some sort of excuse—a poor one would do, so utterly unsuspicious was she. This was humiliation indeed. He was almost ready to take a vow never to touch a card again. Almost; but not quite.

On the other hand, his thoughts would fly off to Margaret Ducie and her thousand nameless witcheries. There was quite a wild fever in his blood when he dwelt on her. It seemed a month since he had last seen and spoken with Maria Kettle—Maria, that sweet, pale abstraction, who seemed to him to-night so unsubstantial and far away. But he did not want to think of her just now. He wanted to forget that he was engaged to her, or as good as engaged. Though some innate voice of conscience whispered that, if he valued his own peace of mind, it would be well for him to keep out of the way of the beautiful ignis fatuus which had shone on his path to-night for the first time.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DOCTOR'S VERDICT.

It was just about this time that Squire Denison, dining alone, was taken ill at the dinner-table. Very rarely indeed was Ella out at that hour, but it chanced that she had gone to spend a long evening with Lady Cleeve. The Squire's symptoms looked alarming to Aaron Stone and his wife; and the young man, Hubert, went off on horseback to Nullington to summon Dr. Spreckley.

The Doctor had practised in Nullington all his life. He was a man of sixty now, with a fine florid complexion, and a lover of good cheer and of whiskey; though nobody ever saw him the worse for what he had taken. He had a cheerful, hearty way with him, that to many people was better than all his physic, seeming to think that most of the ills of life could be laughed away if his patients would only laugh heartily enough. Mr. Denison had great confidence in him; and no wonder, since he had attended him for twenty years. Dr. Spreckley was not merely the Squire's medical attendant, but news-purveyor-in-general to him as well. Now that the Squire got out so little himself and saw so few visitors at the Hall, he looked to

Spreckley to keep him au courant with all the gossip anent mutual acquaintances and all the local doings for a dozen miles round; and Spreckley was quite equal to the demands upon him.

During the past year or two, Mr. Denison had experienced several of these sudden attacks; but none of them were so violent as was the one this evening. Dr. Spreckley's cheerful face changed when he saw the symptoms: and the look, momentary though it was, was not lost on the sick man.

"Where's Ella?" asked the Doctor, somewhat surprised at her absence.

"Miss Ella's gone to Lady Cleeve's for the evening, sir," answered Mrs. Stone, who was in attendance.

"And a good thing too," put in the Squire, rousing himself. "Look here—I won't have her told I've been ill. Do you hear—all of you? No good to worry the lassie."

Dr. Spreckley administered certain remedies, saw the Squire safely into bed, and stayed with him for a couple of hours afterwards, Aaron supplying him with a small decanter of whiskey. The symptoms were already disappearing, and Dr. Spreckley's face was hopeful.

"You'll be all right, Squire, after a good night's rest," said he with all his hearty cheerfulness. "I'll be over by ten o'clock in the morning."

When Ella returned, as she did at nine o'clock, nothing was told her. "The master felt tired, and so went to bed betimes," was all Mrs. Stone said. And Ella suspected nothing.

While she was breakfasting the next morning—her uncle sometimes took his alone in his room—Aaron came to her, and said the master wanted her. Ella hastened to him.

"Why! are you in bed, uncle dear!" she exclaimed.

"Ay, felt lazy; thought I'd have breakfast before I got up. Why not?—Got a mind for a walk this fine morning, lassie?"

"Yes, uncle, if you wish me to go anywhere. It is a beautiful morning."

"So, so! one should get out this fine weather when one can: wish my legs were as young to get over the ground as they used to be. I want you to go to the vicarage, child, and take a letter to Kettle that I've had here these few days. It's about the votes for the Incurables, and it's time it was attended to. Tell him he must see to it for me and fill it in. Mind you are with him before ten o'clock, and then he'll not be gone out. D'ye hear?"

"Yes, uncle. I will be sure to go."

"And look here, lassie," added the Squire; "if you like to stay the morning with Maria, you can. I sha'n't want you; I shall be pottering about here half the day."

Having thus cleverly got rid of his niece, the coast was clear for Dr. Spreckley. True to his time, the Doctor drove up in his ramshackle old gig.

"You are better this morning; considerably better," he said to his patient after a quiet examination. "That was a nasty attack, and I hope we shan't have any more of them for a long time to come."

"I was worse, Doctor, than even you knew of," said Mr. Denison. "The wind of the grave blew colder on me yesterday evening than it has ever blown before. Another such bout, and out I shall go, like the snuff of a candle. Eh, now, come?"

"We must hope that you won't have another such bout, Squire," was Dr. Spreckley's cheerful answer.

"Is there nothing you can prescribe, or do, Doctor, that will guarantee me against another such attack?" asked Mr. Denison with almost startling suddenness.

Dr. Spreckley put down the phial he had taken in his hand, and faced his patient. "I should be a knave, Squire, to say that I could guarantee you against anything. We can only do our best and hope for the best."

Mr. Denison was silent for a few moments, then he began again. "Look here, Spreckley; you know how old I am—on the twenty-fourth of next April I shall be seventy years old. You know, too, what interests are at stake, and how much depends upon my living to see that day."

"I am not likely to forget," said the Doctor. "These are matters that we have talked over many a time."

"Do you believe in your heart, Spreckley, that I shall live to see that day—the twenty-fourth of next April?" The question was put very solemnly, and the sick man craned his long neck forward and stared at the Doctor with wild hungry eyes, as though his salvation depended on the next few words.

The physician's ruddy cheek lost somewhat of its colour as he hesitated. He fidgeted nervously with his feet, he coughed behind his hand, and then he turned and faced his patient. The signs had not been lost on the Squire.

"Really, my dear sir, your question is a most awkward one," said Spreckley slowly, "and one which I am far from feeling sure that I am in a position to answer with any degree of accuracy."

"Words—words—words!" exclaimed the sick man, turning impatiently on his pillow. "Man alive! you can answer my question if you choose to do so. All I ask is, do you *believe*, do you think in your own secret heart, that I shall live to see the twenty-fourth of April? You can answer me that."

"Are you in earnest in wishing for an answer, Mr. Denison?"

"Most terribly in earnest. I tell you again that another turn like that of last night would finish me. At least, I believe it would. And I might have another attack any day or any hour, eh?"

"You might. But—but," added the Doctor, striving to soften his words, "it might not be so severe, you know."

"There are several things that I want to do before I go hence and

am seen no more," spoke the Squire in a low tone. "You would not advise me to delay doing them?"

"I would not advise you, or any man, to delay such."

"You do not think in your heart that I shall live to see the twenty-fourth of April—come now, Spreckley!"

The Doctor placed his hand gently on Mr. Denison's wrist, and bent forward. "If you must have the truth, you must."

"Yes, yes," was the eager, impatient interposition. "The truth—the truth."

"Well then—these attacks of yours are increasing both in frequency and violence. Each one that comes diminishes your reserve of strength. One more sharp attack might, and probably would, prove fatal to you."

"You must ward it off, Spreckley."

"I don't know how to."

The Squire lifted his hand slightly, and then let it drop on the coverlet again. Was it a gesture of resignation, or of despair? His chin drooped forward on his breast, and there was unbroken silence in the room for some moments.

"Doctor," said Mr. Denison then, and his tones sounded strangely hollow, "I will give you five thousand pounds if you can keep me alive till the twenty-fifth of April. Five thousand, Spreckley!"

"All the money in the world cannot prolong life by a single hour when our time has come," said the surgeon. "You know that as well as I, Mr. Denison. Whatever human skill can do for you shall be done; of that you may rest assured."

"But still you think I can't last out—eh?"

The Doctor took one of his patient's hands and pressed it gently between both of his. "My dear old friend, I think that nothing short of a miracle could prolong your life till then;" and there was an unwonted tremor in his voice as he spoke.

Nothing more was said. Dr. Spreckley turned to the door, remarking that he would come up again later in the day.

"There's no necessity," said the Squire, with spirit, as if he took the fiat in dudgeon and did not believe it. "No occasion for you to come at all, to-day. I am better; much better. I should not have stayed in bed this morning, only you ordered me."

"Very well, Squire."

Mr. Denison lay back on his pillows and shut his eyes as the door closed on his friend and physician. Aaron Stone, coming into the room a little later, thought his master was asleep, and went out without disturbing him. An hour later Mr. Denison's bell rang loudly and peremptorily. The Squire was sitting up in bed when Aaron entered the room, and the old man marvelled to see him look so much better in so short a time. "An hour since he was like a man half dead, and now he looks as well as he did a year ago," muttered Aaron to himself. There was, indeed, a brightness in his eyes and a

faint colour in his cheeks, such as had not been seen there for a long time; and his voice had something of its old sharp and peremptory tone.

"Aaron, what do you think Dr. Spreckley has been telling me this morning?" he suddenly asked.

"I'm a bad hand at guessing, Squire, as you ought to know by this time," was the somewhat ungracious answer.

"He tells me that I shall not live to see the twenty-fourth of next April."

Aaron's rugged face turned as white as it was possible for it to turn; a small tray that he had in his hands fell with a crash to the ground.

"Oh! master, don't say that—don't say that!" he groaned.

"But I must say it: and what's more, I feel it may be true," returned the Squire.

"I can't believe it; and I won't," stammered the old servant: who, whatever his faults of temper might have been, was passionately attached to his master. Aaron had never seriously thought the end was so near. The Squire had had these queer attacks; true: but did he not always rally from them and be as well as ever? Why, look at him now!

"Spreckley must be a fool, sir, to say such a thing as that! Had he been at the whiskey bottle?"

"I forced the truth from him," spoke the Squire. "It is always safest to get at the truth, however unpalatable it may be. Eh, now?"

"I'm fairly dazed," said the old man. "But I don't believe it. When you go, master, it will be time for me to go, too."

"It's not that I'm afraid to go," said the Squire—"when did a Denison fear to die?—and Heaven knows my life has not been such a pleasant one of late years that I need greatly care to find the end near. It's the property, Aaron—this old roof-tree and all the broad acres—you know who will come in for them if I don't live to see next April."

The old serving-man's mouth worked convulsively; he tried to speak but could not. Tears streamed down his rugged cheeks. Pretending to busy himself about the fireplace, he kept his back turned to the Squire.

"If it were not for that, I should not care how soon my summons came," continued Mr. Denison; "but it's hard to have the apple snatched from you at the moment of victory. I would give half that I'm possessed of to anyone who would insure my living to the end of next April. Why not?"

"What's Spreckley but an old woman? he don't know," said Aaron. "Why don't you have some of the big doctors down from London, sir? Like enough they could pull you through when Spreckley can't."

The Squire laughed, a little dismally. "You seem to forget that

had a couple of big-wigs down from London on the same errand some months ago. They and Spreckley had a consultation, and what was the result? They fully endorsed all that he had done, and said that they themselves could not have improved on his method of treatment. It would not be an atom of use, old comrade, to have them down again. That's my belief."

It was not Aaron's. He had no particular opinion of Spreckley—and he was fearfully anxious.

"Poor Ella! Poor lassie!" murmured the Squire very gently. "I always hoped she would be the mistress of Heron Dyke when I was gone. But—but—but——" He broke off. He could not speak of it. Things just now seemed very bitter, grievously hard to bear.

"Won't you get up, master?"

"Not just now. You can come in by-and-by, Aaron," replied the Squire: and Aaron crept out of the room without another word.

The sitting-room of Aaron Stone and his wife was a homely apartment, opening from the kitchen. To this he betook himself, shut the door behind him, and sat down in silence. Dorothy had her lap full of white paper, cutting it out in fringed rounds to cover some preserves that had been made. Happening to look at her husband, she saw the tears trickling fast down his withered cheeks.

Dorothy's eyes and mouth alike opened. She gazed at him with a mixture of curiosity and alarm. Not for twenty years had she seen such a sight. Pushing back her silver hair under her neat white cap, she dropped the scissors and the paper, and sat staring.

"What is it?" she asked in a faint voice, picturing all kinds of unheard-of evils. "Anything happened to the lad, Aaron?"

"The lad" was Hubert; her grandson. He was very dear to Dorothy: perhaps not less so to Aaron. Aaron did not answer; could not: and, as if to relieve her fears, Hubert came in the next moment.

"Why, grandfather, what on earth has come to you?" cried the young man, no less astonished than Dorothy.

With a half sob, Aaron told what had come to them: the trouble had taken all his crusty ungraciousness out of him. The master was going to die. Spreckley said he could not keep him alive until next April. And Miss Ella would have to turn out of Heron Dyke to make way for those enemies, the other branch. And they should have to turn out too; and he and Dorothy, for all he knew, would die in the workhouse!

An astounding revelation. No one spoke for a little while. Then Dorothy began with her superstitions.

"I knew we should have a death in the house before long. There's been a winding-sheet in the candle twice this week; and on Sunday night as I came over the marshes three corpse-candles appeared there and seemed to follow me all the way across. I didn't think it would be the Squire, though: I thought of Bolton's wife."

Bolton was the coachman, and his wife was delicate.

"Hush, granny!" reproved Hubert; "all that is nonsense, you know. Why does not the Squire call in further advice?" he added after a pause. "Spreckley's not good for much save a gossip."

"I asked him why not," said Aaron; "but he seems to think his time is come. If they could only keep him alive till next April, he says: that's all he harps upon."

"And I am sure there must be means of doing it," cried Hubert. "What one medical man can't do, another may. I have a great mind to call in Dr. Jago—saying nothing about it beforehand. He is wonderfully clever."

"The master might not forgive you, Hubert."

"But if the new man could prolong his life!" debated Hubert. "I'll think about it," he added, catching up his low-crowned hat.

He walked across the yard in his well-made shooting-coat that a lord might wear, and whistled to one of the dogs. The two housemaids stood in what was called the keeping-room, ironing fine things at the table underneath the window. They looked after the young man with admiring eyes. He held himself aloof from them, as a master does from a servant, but the girls liked him, for in manner to them he was civil and kind.

"Is he not handsome!" cried Ann. "And aren't both the old people proud of him?"

"What do you think I saw last night?" said Martha in a low tone, as Hubert Stone disappeared through the green door leading to the shrubbery. "I was coming home from that errand to Nullington, when, out there in the park, hiding behind a tree and peering at our windows here, was a grey figure that one might have taken for a ghost—poor Susan Keen. She did give me a turn, though."

"I wonder they don't stop her watching the house at night in the way she does," returned Ann, shaking out one of Mrs. Stone's muslin caps. "It gives one a creepy feeling to have her watching the windows like that—and to know what she's watching for."

"You know what she says, Ann!"

"Yes, I know; and a very uncomfortable thing it is," rejoined the younger servant. "If she sees Katherine at the window ——"

"She told me again last night that she does see her," interrupted the elder; "has seen her three times now, in all. She says that Katherine stands at the window of her old room, in the moonlight."

Ann shook herself; she was nearly as superstitious as old Dorothy. "Don't you see what it implies, Martha? If Katherine is seen at the window, she must be in the house; that's all. I wish they'd have that north wing barred up!"

"You are ironing that net handkerchief all askew, Ann!"

"One has not got one's proper wits, talking of these ghostly things," was Ann's petulant answer, as she lifted the net off the blanket with a fling.

Hubert, meanwhile, was going down to the shore. What he had learnt troubled him in no measured degree, and his busy brain was hard at work. If only this fiat, which threatened evil to all of them, might be averted!

The tide was out, and he walked along the sands, flinging his stick now and again into the water for the dog to fetch out, as he recalled what he had heard about the almost miraculous skill of this Dr. Jago; who was said, nevertheless, to be an unscrupulous man in his remedies—kill or cure. Could *he* keep that life in Mr. Denison, which, as it appeared, Dr. Spreckley could not? These bold practitioners were often lucky ones. If Jago ——

Hubert Stone halted, both in steps and thought. There flashed into his mind, he knew not why, something he had read in an old French work, recently bought: for the young fellow was a good French scholar. It was a case analogous to Mr. Denison's—where a patient had been kept alive, in spite of nature—or almost in spite of it. The means tried then, and which were minutely described, might answer now. Hubert's breath quickened as he thought of it: and for two hours he remained there, revolving this and that.

A strange look of mingled excitement and determination sat on his face when he got back to the Hall. Mrs. Stone lamented to him that the dinner was over, meaning their dinner, all cold now. Hubert answered that he did not want dinner; but he wanted to see the Squire if he were alone. Yes, he was alone; and he seemed pretty well now. And not a word was to be breathed to Miss Ella about his illness: those were the strict orders issued.

When Hubert went in he found the Squire seated in his easy chair in front of the fire. He looked very worn and thin, but his eyes were as resolute and his lips as firmly set as they had ever been.

"After what my grandfather told me this morning I could not help coming to see you, sir," said Hubert. "This is very sad news; but I hope that it is much exaggerated."

"There's no exaggeration about it, boy. You see before you, I fear, a dying man. Come now!"

"I am very, very sorry to hear it."

"Ay—ay—good lad, good lad! Some of you will miss me a bit, eh?"

"We shall all miss you very much, Squire: we shall never have such a master again. Of course, sir, I know that your great wish all along has been to live till your seventieth birthday had come and gone. Surely you will live to see that wish fulfilled!"

"That's just what I shan't live to see, if Spreckley's right," answered the Squire, and his face darkened as he spoke. "For my life I care little; it has been like a flickering candle these few years past. It's the knowledge that the estate will go away, from my pretty birdie, to a man whom I have hated all my life, that tries me. It is like the taste of Dead Sea apples in my mouth."

Hubert drew his chair a little nearer—for he had been bidden to

sit. "If you will pardon me, sir, for saying it, I do not think you ought to take what Dr. Spreckley says for granted. You should have better advice."

"The London doctors have been down once—and they did me no good. They'd not do it now. And there'd be the trouble and expense incurred for nothing."

"I was not thinking of London doctors, sir, but of one nearer home—Dr. Jago."

"Pooh! They say he is a quack."

Hubert Stone bent his head, and talked low and earnestly—describing what he had heard of Dr. Jago's wonderful skill. "I—I know a little of medicine myself, sir," he added; "sometimes I wish I had been brought up to it, for I believe I have a natural aptitude for the science, and I read medical books, and have been in hospitals; and —and I think, Squire, that a clever practitioner who knows his business could at least keep you alive until next April. Ay, and past it. I almost think *I* could."

Mr. Denison smiled. The idea of Hubert dabbling in such things tickled him. "Well, and how would you set about it?" he demanded, in pleasant mockery.

Hubert said a few words in a low tone; his voice seemed to grow lower as he continued. He looked strangely in earnest; his face was dark and eager.

"The lad must be mad—to think he could keep me alive by those means!" interrupted the Squire, staring at Hubert from under his shaggy brows, as though he half thought he saw a lunatic before him.

"If you would only let me finish, sir—only listen while I describe the treatment ——"

"Pray, did you ever witness the treatment you would describe—and see a life prolonged by it?"

Without directly answering the question, Hubert resumed the argument in his low and eager tones. Gradually the Squire grew interested—perhaps almost unto belief.

"And you could — could doctor me up in this manner, you think!" he exclaimed, lifting his hand and letting it drop again. "Boy, you almost take my breath away."

"Perhaps I could not, sir. But I say Dr. Jago might."

Squire Denison sat thinking, his head bent down. "Do you know this Dr. Jago?" he presently asked. "Have you met him?"

"Once or twice, sir. And I was struck with an impression of his inward power."

"Well, I—I will see him," decided the Squire. "And if he thinks he can—can keep life in me, I will make it worth his while. Why, lad, I'd give half my fortune, nearly, to be able to will away Heron Dyke out of the clutches of those harpies, who look to inherit it, and who have kept their spies about us here. You may bring this new doctor to me."

A glad light came into Hubert's face: he was at least as anxious as his master that Heron Dyke should not pass to strangers.

"Shall I bring him to-morrow, sir?"

"Ay, to-morrow. Why not? Spreckley will be here at ten; let the other come at noon. But look you here, lad: not a word to him beforehand about this idea of yours, this new—new treatment. I'll see him first."

The clock was striking twelve the following day when Dr. Jago rang at the door of the hall. He was a little, dark-featured, foreign-looking man of thirty, with a black moustache and a pointed beard, and small restless eyes that seemed never to look steadfastly at anything or anybody, imparting an impression of being always on his guard. He had come to Nullington about a year ago, a stranger to everyone in it, and had started there in practice. His charges were low, and his patients chiefly those who could not afford to pay much in the shape of doctors' bills. But Dr. Spreckley was an elderly man, and Dr. Downes might be considered an old man, so there was no knowing what might happen in the course of a few years. Meanwhile Theophilus Jago possessed his soul in patience and made ends meet as best he could. It was a great event in his life to be sent for by the master of Heron Dyke.

"You are Dr. Jago, I think?" began the Squire, who was again in bed; and the Doctor bowed assent.

"I and my medical attendant, Dr. Spreckley, have had a slight difference of opinion. In all probability he will not visit me again, and I have sent for you in the hope that we may get on better together than Spreckley and I did."

"I am flattered by your preference, sir. You may rely upon my doing my best to serve you in every way."

"Probably you may have heard that I have been ill for a long time: people will talk: and, as a medical man, you most likely are aware of the nature of my complaint?"

Dr. Jago admitted this.

"I had a bad attack two days ago. Yesterday I asked Spreckley whether I should last over the twenty-fourth of next April. He told me that I could do so only by a miracle. He says I can't live, and I say that I must and will live over the date in question."

"And you have sent for me to—to ——?"

"To keep me alive. Spreckley can't do it. You must. Now, don't say another word till you have examined me."

Not another word did Dr. Jago utter for a quarter of an hour, beyond asking certain questions in connection with the malady. This over, he sat down by the bedside and drew a long breath.

"Well, what's the verdict? Out with it," added the Squire grimly, the old hungry, wistful look rising in his eyes.

"I suppose you want to hear the truth and nothing but the truth, Mr. Denison?" said Dr. Jago.

"That is precisely what I do want to hear. Why not?"

"Then, sir, I think it most probable that Dr. Spreckley is correct. I fear I can only confirm his opinion."

There was a moment or two of silence. "Then you say, with him, that I shall not live to see the twenty-fourth of April?"

"There is, of course, a possibility that you may do so," replied Dr. Jago, "but the probabilities are all the other way. I am very sorry, sir, to have to tell you this."

"Keep your sorrow until you are asked for it," returned the Squire, drily. "Perhaps you will pour me out half a glass of that Madeira. I am not so strong as I should like to be."

Dr. Jago did as he was requested, and then sat down and waited. Turning on him with startling suddenness, the sick man seized him by the wrist with a grip of iron, to pull him closer, and spoke with a grim earnestness.

"Look here, Jago, it's not of any use your telling me, or a thousand other doctors, that I shall not live to see April. I must and will live till then, and you must see that I do: you must keep me in life. Man! you stare as if I were asking you to kill me, instead of to cure me."

Dr. Jago tried to smile. He evidently doubted whether he had to deal with a lunatic. "Pardon me, Mr. Denison," he said, "but in your condition you must avoid excitement. Perfect quiet is your greatest safeguard."

The sick man shrugged his shoulders. "Well, well, you are perhaps right. You know my young secretary—Hubert Stone?"

"A little."

"And I daresay you think him a shrewd, clever young fellow, eh! But he is more clever than you think for, and has dabbled in many a curious science,; medicine, for one. He—listen, Mr. Physician—he has suggested a mode of treatment by which he believes I may be kept alive. Come now!"

Dr. Jago's face expressed a mixture of surprise and incredulity not unmingled with sarcasm. Mr. Hubert Stone would indeed be a very clever gentleman if he could keep life in a dying man.

"*I* do not know of any such treatment, Mr. Denison."

"Possibly not. But I suppose you are open to learn it?"

"If it can be taught me."

"Well, you go into the next room. Hubert is there, I believe, and will explain it to you better than I can. I never bothered my head about physics. When the conference is over, come back to me."

Half an hour had elapsed; quite that; and the Squire was growing impatient, when Dr. Jago returned. He was looking very grave.

"Will the treatment answer?" he cried out impatiently, before the Doctor could speak.

"It might answer, Mr. Denison; I do not say it would not. But —it is dangerous."

"And what if it is dangerous? I am willing to risk it—and I shall pay you well. What, you hesitate? Why, I have heard say that dangerous remedies are not unknown to you; that with you it is sometimes kill or cure."

"In a hopeless case possibly. Not otherwise."

"And have you not just told me mine is hopeless?"

"True."

"Then you will take me in hand. Dear me!—if I were telling you to give me a dose of prussic acid as you stand there, you could but look as you are looking. See here. Listen. I will have these —these remedies tried, young man, and by you. I know your skill. I give you five hundred pounds at once; and I make it up to two thousand if you carry me over to the twenty-fifth of April."

"I accept the terms," said Dr. Jago, awaking from a reverie, and speaking with prompt decision now his mind was made up. To a struggling practitioner the money looked like a mine of gold: and perhaps Squire Denison's imperative will influenced his. "And I hope and trust I *shall* be able to carry you over the necessary period," he added with intense earnestness. "My best endeavours shall be devoted to it."

Outside the door Hubert Stone was waiting, anxiety in his eyes.

"Yes, I have consented," said Dr. Jago, in answer to their silent questioning. "If we succeed—well. But I cannot forget the risk. And these hazardous risks, if they be discovered, are fatal to the reputation of a professional man."

"Take the book home with you, and study the case well," said Hubert, putting a volume in the Doctor's hand. "Some little risk there must of course be, but I think not much. It succeeded there: why should it not succeed with Squire Denison?"

That evening Dr. Spreckley received a letter, written by Hubert Stone in his master's name, dismissing him from further attendance at Heron Dyke. The Squire added a kind message and enclosed a cheque; but he very unmistakably hinted that Dr. Spreckley was not expected to call again, even as a friend. Two doctors who held opposing views, and who pursued totally opposite modes of treatment, had best not come into contact with each other.

(To be continued.)

CREWEL-WORK.

THE border of blossoms and fruit and flow'rs
Grows under the skilful hand,
And butterflies flutter among the leaves,
While birds of a tropic land
Perch on the boughs of fantastic trees—
Themselves a fantastic band.

The soft blues melt into softer greys,
And the grey is lost in the green,
A silken thread crosses with fairy foot
Its homelier rivals between,
As a gay Cinderella, e'er stroke of twelve,
In her jewels and beauty's sheen.

The purples and fawns and delicate pinks
Are flushed by a crimson ray,
And a golden streak glimmers out here and there,
Like a sunbeam in wanton play
E'er its statelier comrades have marched in sight
To cheer the twilight away.

And the lady bends over her dainty work,
A dreamy smile on her face,
Thinking of days buried deep in the past,
While her dext'rous fingers trace
Forms copied from ancient tapestry, full
Of nice and whimsical grace.

Thinking, perchance, of those war-like times
When ladies lived in their bow'rs,
Shut out from the stirring world beyond,
Shut in with their music and flow'rs,
Contenting themselves with needle and lute
Through all the languid hours :

When the highest art the maiden knew
Was cunningly to pourtray,
In broidered figure, the chivalrous deeds
Of battle or tournament gay,
And border the same with some quaint device
Of formal tendril and spray :

When the tale of daring which sounded so sweet
As it fell from her lover's tongue,
Or the touching ballad of love and death
Which her little page had sung,
Might repeat itself on her chamber walls
Where the costly arras hung.

"Were those happier days," the lady asks,
In a pause of her pleasant dream,
"Than these modern days of excitement and haste,
Cheap literature, gas, and steam;
When women may brave the world alone,
And 'Advance' is the thought supreme?"

When only a passing hour, now and then,
Can be snatched from the busy day
To play with the crewels heaped on her lap,
And indulge in phantasy;
When adventures no longer wait to be told
Of crusader or mock-affray:

But chase, and battle, and foreign tour
Are followed by line and rule;
And the noble thought is left unsaid
In the fear of ridicule,
And the generous impulse sternly checked
In fashion's frigid school.

"Is it better so?—Is it gain or loss?"
She asks with a pensive sigh:
And still the balance sways up and down,
And still there is no reply;
Till at last a whisper sounds in her soul—
"We are born, and then we die.

"All things must change in this life of ours
As we pass to the life supreme;
And still what is good is left behind;
And still, like a struggling beam,
Good shines out to-day, if but we discern
What *is*, not what it would *seem*.

"If, through the crust and varnish, we pierce
To the beating heart below,
We shall find the self-same spirit there
As in ages long ago;
And own that even these common-place times
May have the heroic to show.

"Aye, the 'golden year,' as the poet sings,
Is for ever at the door;
And so our part must always be
To garner the precious store—
To add to the treasures the past has brought,
From the present, still more and more."

EMMA RHODES.

VERENA FONTAINE'S REBELLION.

THE dwellings in Ship Street, Tower Hill, may be regarded as desirable residences by the young merchant-seamen whose vessels are lying in the neighbouring docks, but they certainly do not possess much attraction for the general eye.

Seated in Edward Pym's parlour, the features of the room gradually impressed themselves upon my mind, and they remain there still. They would have remained, I think, without the dreadful tragedy that was so soon to take place in it. It was weary work waiting. Captain Tanerton, tired with his long and busy day, was nodding asleep in the opposite chair, and I had nothing to do but look about me.

It was a small room, rather shabby, the paper of a greenish cast, the faded carpet originally red : and the bed-room behind, as much as could be seen of it through the half-open door, looked smaller and poorer. The chairs were horsehair, the small table in the middle had a purple cloth on it, on which stood the lamp, that the landlady had just lighted. A carved ivory ornament, representing a procession of priests and singers, probably a present to Mrs. Rich-enough from some merchant-captain, stood under a glass shade on a bracket against the wall; the mantelpiece was garnished with a looking-glass and some china shepherds and shepherdesses. A monkey-jacket of Pym's lay across the back of a chair; some books and his small desk were on the chiffonier. In the rooms above, as we learnt later, lodged a friend of Pym's, one Alfred Saxby, who was looking out for a third mate's berth.

At last Pym came in. Uncommonly surprised he seemed to see us sitting there, but not at all put out: he thought the Captain had come down on some business connected with the ship. Jack quietly opened the ball; saying what he had to say.

"Yes, sir, I do know where Miss Verena Fontaine is, but I decline to say," was Pym's answer when he had listened.

"No, sir, nothing will induce me to say," he added to further remonstrance, "and you cannot compel me. I am under your authority at sea, Captain Tanerton, but I am not on shore—and not at all in regard to my private affairs. Miss Verena Fontaine is under the protection of friends, and that is quite enough."

Enough or not enough, this was the utmost we could get from him. His captain talked, and he talked, each of them in a civilly-cold way; but nothing more satisfactory came of it. Pym wound up by saying the young lady was his cousin and he could take care of her without being interfered with.

"Do you trust him, Johnny Ludlow?" asked Jack, as we came away.

"I don't trust him on the whole; not a bit of it. But he seems to speak truth in saying she is with friends."

And, as the days went on, bringing no tidings of Verena, Sir Dace Fontaine grew angry as a raging tiger.

When a ship is going out of dock, she is more coquettish than a beauty in her teens. Not in herself, but in her movements. Advertised to sail to-day, you will be told she'll not start until to-morrow; and when to-morrow comes the departure will be put off until the next day, perhaps to the next week.

Thus it was with the *Rose of Delhi*. From some uncompromising exigencies, whether connected with the cargo, the crew, the brokers, or any other of the unknown mysteries pertaining to ships, the day that was to have witnessed her departure—Thursday—did not witness it. The brokers, Freeman and Co., let it transpire on board that she would go out of dock the next morning. About mid-day Captain Tanerton presented himself at their office in Eastcheap.

"I shall not sail to-morrow—with your permission," said he to Mr. James Freeman.

"Yes, you will—if she's ready," returned the broker. "Gould says she will be."

"Gould may think so; I do not. But, whether she be ready or not, Mr. Freeman, I don't intend to take her out to-morrow."

The words might be decisive words, but the Captain's tone was genial as he spoke them, and his frank, pleasant smile sat on his face. Mr. Freeman looked at him. They valued Captain Tanerton as they perhaps valued no other master in their employ, these brothers Freeman; but James had a temper that was especially happy in contradiction.

"I suppose you'd like to say that you won't go out on a Friday!"

"That's just it," said Jack.

"You are superstitious, Captain Tanerton," mocked the broker.

"I am not," answered Jack. "But I sail with those who are. Sailors are more foolish on this point than you can imagine: and I believe—I believe in my conscience—that ships, sailing on a Friday, have come to grief through their crew losing heart. No matter what impediment is met with—bad weather, accidents, what not—the men say at once it's of no use, we sailed on a Friday. They lose their spirit, and their energy with it; and I say, Mr. Freeman, that vessels have been lost through this, which might have otherwise been saved. I will not go out of dock to-morrow; and I refuse to do it in your interest as much as in my own."

"Oh, bother," was all James Freeman rejoined. "You'll have to go if she's ready."

But the words made an impression. James Freeman knew what sailors were nearly as well as Jack knew: and he could not help

recalling to memory that beautiful ship of Freeman Brothers, the *Lily of Japan.* The *Lily* had been lost only six months ago; and those of her crew, who were saved, religiously stuck to it that the calamity was brought about through having sailed on a Friday.

The present question did not come to an issue. For, on the Friday morning, the *Rose of Delhi* was not ready for sea; would not be ready that day. On the Saturday morning she was not ready either; and it was finally decided that Monday should be the day of departure. On the Saturday afternoon Captain Tanerton ran down to Timberdale for four-and-twenty hours; Squire Todhetley, his visit to London over, travelling down by the same train.

Verena Fontaine had not yet turned up, and Sir Dace was nearly crazy. Not only was he angry at being thwarted, but one absorbing, special fear lay upon him—that she would come back a married woman. Pym was capable of any sin, he told the Squire and Coralie, even of buying the wedding-ring; and Verena was capable of letting it be put on her finger. "No papa," dissented Coralie in her equable manner, "Vera is too fond of money and of the good things money buys, to risk the loss of the best part of her fortune. She will not marry Pym until she is of age; be sure of that. When he has sailed she will come home safe and sound, and tell us where she has been."

Captain Tanerton went down, I say, to Timberdale. He stayed at the rectory with his wife and brother until the Sunday afternoon, and then returned to London. The *Rose of Delhi* was positively going out on Monday, so he had to be back—and, I may as well say here, that Jack, good-natured Jack, had invited me to go in her as far as Gravesend.

During that brief stay at Timberdale, Jack was not in his usual spirits. His wife, Alice, noticed it, and asked him whether anything was the matter. Not anything whatever, Jack readily answered. In truth there was not. At least, anything he could talk of. A weight lay on his spirits, and he could not account for it. The strong instinct, which had seemed to warn him against sailing with Pym again, had gradually left him since he knew that Pym was to sail, whether or not. In striving to make the best of it, he had thrown off the feeling: and the unaccountable depression that weighed him down could not arise from that cause. It was a strange thing altogether, this; one that never, in all his life, had he had any experience of; but it was not less strange than true.

Monday. The *Rose of Delhi* lay in her place in the freshness of the sunny morning, making ready to go out of dock with the incoming tide. I went on board betimes: and I thought I had never been in such a bustling scene before. The sailors knew what they were about, I conclude, but to me it seemed all confusion. The Captain I could not see anywhere; but his chief officer, Pym,

seemed to be more busy than a certain common enemy of ours is said to be in a gale of wind.

"Is the Captain not on board?" I asked of Mark Ferrar, as he was whisking past me on deck.

"Oh no, sir; not yet. The Captain will not come on board till the last moment—if he does then."

The words took me by surprise. "What do you mean, by saying 'If he does then'?"

"He has so much to do, sir; he is at the office now, signing the bills of lading. If he can't get done in time he will join at Gravesend when we take on some passengers. The Captain is not wanted on board when we are going out of dock, Mr. Johnny," added Ferrar, seeing my perplexed look. "The river-pilot takes the ship out."

He pointed to the latter personage, just then making his appearance on deck. I wondered whether all river-pilots were like him. He was broad enough to make two ordinarily stout people; and his voice, from long continuous shouting, had become nothing less than a raven's croak.

At the last moment, when the ship was getting away, and I had given the captain up, he came on board. How glad I was to see his handsome, kindly face!

"I've had a squeak for it, Johnny," he laughed, as he shook my hand: "but I meant to go down with you if I could."

Then came all the noise and stir of getting away: the croaking of the pilot alone distinguishable to my uninitiated ears. "Slack away the stern-line"—he called it starn. "Haul in head-rope." "Here, carpenter, bear a hand, get the cork-fender over the quarter-gallery." "What are you doing aft there?—why don't you slack away that stern-line?" Every other moment it seemed to me that we were going to pitch into the craft in the pool, or they into us. However, we got on without mishap.

Captain Tanerton was crossing the ship, after holding a confab with the pilot, when a young man, whom he did not recognize, stepped aside out of his way, and touched his cap. The Captain looked surprised, for the badge on the cap was the one worn by his own officers.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Mr. Saxby, if you please, sir."

"Mr. Saxby! What do you do here?"

"Third mate, if you please, sir," repeated the young man. "Your third mate, Mr. Jones, met with an accident yesterday; he broke his leg; and my friend, Pym, spoke of me to Mr. Gould."

Captain Tanerton was not only surprised, but vexed. First, for the accident to Jones, who was a very decent young fellow; next, at his being superseded by a stranger, and a friend of Pym's. He put a few questions, found the new man's papers were in order, and so made the best of it.

"You will find me a good and considerate master, Mr. Saxby, if you do your duty with a will," he said in a kind tone.

"I hope I shall, sir; I'll try to," answered the young man.

On we went swimmingly, in the wake of the tug-boat; but this desirable tranquillity was erelong destined to be marred.

On coming up from the state-room, as they called it, after regaling ourselves on a cold collation, the Captain was pointing out to me something on shore, when one of the crew approached hastily, and touched his cap. I found it was the carpenter: a steady-looking man, who was fresh to the ship, having joined her half an hour before starting.

"Beg pardon, sir," he began. "Might I ask you when this ship was pumped out last?"

"Why, she is never pumped out," replied the Captain.

"Well, sir," returned the man, "it came into my head just now to sound her, and I find there's two feet of water in the hold."

"Nonsense," said Jack: "you must be mistaken. Why, she has never made a cupful of water since she was built. We have to put water in her to keep her sweet."

"Anyway, sir, there's two feet o' water in her now."

The Captain looked at the man steadily for a moment, and then thought it might be as well to verify the assertion—or the contrary—himself, being a practical man. Taking the sounding-rod from the carpenter's hand, he wiped it dry with an old bag lying near, and then proceeded to sound the well. Quite true: there were two feet of water. No time lost he. Ordering the carpenter to rig the pumps, he called all hands to man them.

For a quarter of an hour, or twenty minutes, the pumps were worked without intermission; then the Captain sounded, as before, doing it himself. There was no diminution of water—it stood at the same level as before pumping. Upon that, he and the carpenter went down into the hold, to listen along the ship's sides, and discover, if they could, where the water was coming in. Five minutes later, Jack was on deck again, his face grave.

"It is coming in abreast of the main hatchway on the starboard side; we can hear it distinctly," he said to the pilot. "I must order the ship back again: I think it right to do so." And the broad pilot, who seemed a very taciturn pilot, made no demur to this, except a grunt. So the tug-boat was ordered to turn round and tow us back again.

"Where's Mr. Pym?" cried the Captain. "Mr. Pym!"

"Mr. Pym's in the cabin, sir," said the steward, who chanced to be passing.

"In the cabin!" echoed Jack, in an accent that seemed to imply the cabin was not Mr. Pym's proper place just then. "Send him to me if you please, steward."

"Yes, sir," replied the steward. But he did not obey with the

readiness exacted on board ship. He hesitated, as if wanting to say something before turning away.

No Pym came. Jack grew impatient, and called out an order or two. Young Saxby came up, touching his cap, according to rule.

"Do you want me, sir?"

"I want Mr. Pym. He is below. Ask him to come to me instantly."

It brought forth Pym. Jack's head was turned away for a moment, and I saw what he did not. That Pym had a fiery face, and walked as if his limbs were slipping from under him.

"Oh, you are here at last, Mr. Pym—did you not receive my first message?" cried Jack, turning round. "The cargo must be broken out to find the place of leakage. See about it smartly: there's no time to waste."

Pym had caught hold of something at hand to enable him to stand steady. He had lost his wits, that was certain; for he stuttered out an answer to the effect that the cargo might be—hanged.

The Captain saw his state then. Feeling a need of renovation possibly, after his morning's exertions, Mr. Pym had been making free, a great deal too much so, with the bottled ale below, and had finished up with brandy-and-water.

The cargo might be hanged!

Captain Tanerton, his brow darkening, spoke a sharp, short, stern reprimand, and ordered Mr. Pym to his cabin.

What could have possessed Pym, unless it might be the spirit that was in the brandy, nobody knew. He refused to obey, broke into open defiance, and gave Captain Tanerton sauce to his face.

"Take him below," said the Captain quietly, to those who were standing round. "Mr. Ferrar, you will lock Mr. Pym's cabin door, if you please, and bring me the key."

This was done, and Mr. Pym encaged. He kicked at his cabin door, and shook it; but he could not escape: he was a prisoner. He swore for a little while at the top of his voice; then he commenced some uproarious singing, and finally fell on his bed and went to sleep.

Hands were set to work to break out the cargo, which they piled on deck; and the source of the leakage was discovered. It seemed a slight thing, after all, to have caused so much commotion—nothing but an old treenail that had not been properly plugged-up. I said so to Ferrar.

"Ah, Mr. Johnny," was Ferrar's answering remark, his face and tone strangely serious, "slight as it may seem to you, it might have sunk us all this night, had we chanced to anchor off Gravesend."

II.

WHAT with the pumps, that were kept at work, and the shifting of the cargo, and the hammering they made in stopping up the leak, we had enough to do this time. And about half-past three o'clock in the afternoon the brave ship, which had gone out so proudly with the tide, got back ignominiously with the end of it, and came to an anchor outside the graving-dock, there not being sufficient water to allow of her entering it. The damage was already three-parts repaired, and the ship would make her final start on the morrow.

"'Twas nothing but a good Providence could have put it into my head to sound the ship, sir," remarked the carpenter, wiping his hot face, as he came on deck for something or other he needed. "But for that, we might none of us have seen the morning's sun."

Jack nodded. These special interpositions of God's good care are not rare, though we do not always recognise them. And yet, but for that return back, the miserable calamity so soon to fall, would not have had the chance to take place.

Captain Tanerton caused himself to be rowed ashore, first of all ordering the door of his prisoner to be unfastened. I got into the waterman's wherry with him, for I had nothing to stay on board for. And a fine ending it was to my day's pleasuring!

"Never mind, Johnny," he said, as we parted. "You can come with us again to-morrow, and I hope we shall have a more lucky start."

Captain Tanerton went straight to the brokers', saw Mr. James Freeman, and told him he would *not* take out Edward Pym. If he did, the man's fate would probably be that of irons from Gravesend to Calcutta.

And James Freeman, a thorough foe to brandy-and-water when taken at wrong times, listened to reason, and gave not a word of dissent. He there and then made Ferrar chief mate, and put another one second in Ferrar's place; a likely young man in their employ who was waiting for a berth. This perfectly satisfied Captain Tanerton, under the circumstances.

The Captain was then rowed back to his ship. By that time it was five o'clock. He told Ferrar of the change; who thanked him heartily, a glow of satisfaction rising to his honest face.

"Where's Pym?" asked the Captain. "He must take his things out of the ship."

"Pym is not on board, sir. Soon after you left, he came up and went ashore: he seemed to have pretty nearly slept off the drink. Sir Dace Fontaine is below," added Ferrar, dropping his voice.

"Sir Dace Fontaine! Does he want me?"

"He wanted Mr. Pym, sir. He has been looking into every part of the ship: he is looking still. He fancies his daughter is concealed on board."

"Oh nonsense!" cried the Captain; "he can't fancy that. As if Miss Fontaine would come down here—and board ships!"

"She was on board yesterday, sir."

"What!" cried the Captain.

"Mr. Pym brought her on board yesterday afternoon, sir," continued Ferrar, his voice as low as it could well go. "He was showing her about the ship."

"How do you know this, Mr. Ferrar?"

"I was here, sir. Expecting to sail last week, I sent my traps on board. Yesterday, wanting a memorandum-book out of my desk, I came down for it. That's how I saw them."

Captain Tanerton, walking forward to meet Sir Dace, knitted his brow. Was Mr. Pym drawing the careless, light-headed girl into mischief? Sir Dace evidently thought so.

"I tell you, Captain Tanerton, she is quite likely to be on board, concealed as a stow-away," persisted Sir Dace, in answer to the Captain's assurance that Verena was not, and could not be in the ship. "When you are safe away from land, she will come out of hiding and they will declare their marriage. That they are married, is only too likely. He brought her on board yesterday afternoon when the ship was lying in St. Katharine's Dock."

"Do you know that he did?" cried Jack, wondering whence Sir Dace got his information.

"I am told so. As I got up your ladder just now I enquired of the first man I saw, whether a young lady was on board. He said no, but that a young lady had come on board with Mr. Pym yesterday afternoon to see the ship. The man was your ship-keeper in dock."

"How did you hear we had got back to-day, Sir Dace?"

"I came down this afternoon to search the ship before she sailed —I was under a misapprehension as to the time of her going out. The first thing I heard was, that the *Rose of Delhi* had gone and had come back again. Pym is capable, I say, of taking Verena out."

"You may be easy on this point, Sir Dace," returned Jack. "Pym does not go out in the ship: he is superseded." And he gave the heads of what had occurred.

It did not tend so please Sir Dace. Edward Pym on the high seas would be a less formidable adversary than Edward Pym on land: and perhaps in his heart of hearts Sir Dace did not really believe his daughter would become a stow-away.

"Won't you help me to find her? to *save* her?" gasped Sir Dace, in pitiful entreaty. "With this change—Pym not going out—I know not what trouble he may not draw her into. Coralie says Verena is not married; but I—Heaven help me! I know not what to think. I must find Pym this night and watch his movements, and find her if I can. You must help me."

"I will help you," said warm-hearted Jack—and he clasped hands

upon it. "I will undertake to find Pym. And, that your daughter is not on board, Sir Dace, I pass you my word."

Sir Dace stepped into the wherry again, to be rowed ashore and get home to his dinner—ordered that evening for six o'clock. In a short while Jack also quitted the ship, and went to Pym's lodgings in Ship Street. Pym was not there.

Mr. Pym had come in that afternoon, said his landlady, Mrs. Richenough, and startled her out of her seven senses; for, knowing the ship had left with the day's tide, she had supposed Mr. Pym to be then off Gravesend, or thereabouts. He told her the ship had sprung a leak and put back again. Mr. Pym had gone out, she added, after drinking a potful of strong tea.

"To sober him," thought the Captain. "Do you expect him back to sleep, Mrs. Richenough?"

"Yes, I do, sir. I took the sheets off his bed this morning, and I've just been and put 'em on again. Mr. Saxby's must be put on too, for he looked in to say he should sleep here."

Where to search for Pym, Jack did not know. Possibly he might have gone back to the ship to offer an apology, now that he was sobered. Jack was bending his steps towards it when he met Ferrar: who told him Pym had not gone back.

Jack put on his considering-cap. He hardly knew what to do, or how to find the fugitives: with Sir Dace, he deemed it highly necessary that Verena should be found.

"Have you anything particular to do to-night, Mr. Ferrar?" he suddenly asked. And Ferrar said he had not.

"Then," continued the Captain, "I wish you would search for Pym." And, knowing Ferrar was thoroughly trustworthy, he whispered a few confidential words of Sir Dace Fontaine's fear and trouble. "I am going to look for him myself," added Jack, "though I'm sure I don't know in what quarter. If you do come across him, keep him within view. You can tell him also that his place on the *Rose of Delhi* is filled up, and he must take his things out of her."

Altogether that had been a somewhat momentous day for Mr. Alfred Saxby—and its events for him were not over yet. He had been appointed to a good ship, and the ship had made a false start, and was back again. An uncle and aunt of his lived at Clapham, and he thought he could not do better than go down there and regale them with the news: we all naturally burn to impart marvels to the world, you know. However, when he reached his relatives' residence, he found they were out; and not long after nine o'clock he was back at Mrs. Richenough's.

"Is Mr. Pym in?" he asked of the landlady; who came forward rubbing her eyes as though she were sleepy, and gave him his candle.

"Oh, he have been in some little time, sir. And a fine row he's

been having with his skipper," added Mrs. Richenough, who sometimes came off the high ropes of politeness when she had disposed of her supper beer.

"A row, has he!" returned Saxby. "Does not like to have been superseded," he added to himself. "I must say Pym was a fool today—to go and drink, as he did, and to sauce the master."

"Screeching out at one another like mad, they've been," pursued Mrs. Richenough. "He do talk stern, that skipper, for a young man and a good-looking one."

"Is the Captain in there now?"

"For all I know: I did think I heard the door shut, but it might have been my fancy. Good-night, sir. Pleasant dreams."

Leaving the candle in Saxby's hands, she returned to her kitchen, which was built out at the back. He halted at the parlour door to listen. No voices were to be heard then; no sounds.

"Pym may have gone to bed—I daresay his head aches," thought Saxby: and he opened the door to see whether the parlour was empty.

Why! what was it?—what was the matter? The young man took one startled look around and then put down the candle, his heart leaping into his mouth.

The lamp on the table threw its bright light on the little room. Some scuffle appeared to have taken place in it. A chair was overturned; the ivory ornament with its glass shade had been swept from its stand to the floor: and by its side lay Edward Pym—dead.

Mr. Alfred Saxby, third mate of that good ship, the *Rose of Delhi*, might be a sufficiently self-possessed individual when encountering sudden surprises at sea; but he certainly did not show himself to be one on shore. When the state of affairs had sufficiently impressed itself on his startled senses, he burst out of the room in mortal terror, shouting out "murder."

There was nobody in the house to hear him but Mrs. Richenough. She came forward, slightly overcome by drowsiness; but the sight she saw woke her up effectually.

"Good mercy!" cried she, running to the prostrate man. "Is he dead?"

"He looks dead," shivered Mr. Saxby, hardly knowing whether he was not dead himself.

They raised Pym's head, and put a pillow under it. The landlady wrung her hands.

"We must have a doctor," she cried: "but I can see he is dead. This comes of that quarrel with his captain: I heard them raving frightfully at one another. There has been a scuffle here—see that chair. Oh! and look at my beautiful ivory knocked down!—and the shade all broke to atoms!"

"I'll fetch Mr. Ferrar," cried Saxby, feeling himself rather powerless to act; and with nobody to aid him but the gabbling woman.

Like mad, Saxby tore up the street, burst in at Mark Ferrar's open door and went full butt against Mark himself; who was at the moment turning quickly out of it.

"Take care, Saxby. What are you about?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake do come, Mr. Ferrar! Pym is dead. He is lying dead on the floor."

The first thing Ferrar did was to scan his junior officer narrowly, wondering whether he could be quite sober. Yes, he seemed to be that; but agitated to trembling, and his face as pale as death. The next minute Ferrar was bending over Pym. Alas, he saw too truly that life was extinct.

"It's his skipper that has done it, sir," repeated the landlady.

"Hush, Mrs. Richenough!" rebuked Ferrar. "Captain Tanerton has not done this."

"But I heard 'em screeching and howling at one another, sir," persisted Mrs. Richenough. "Their quarrel must have come to blows."

"I do not believe it," dissented Ferrar. "Captain Tanerton would not be capable of anything of the kind. Fight with a man who has served under him!—you don't understand things, Mrs. Richenough."

Saxby had run for the nearest medical man. Ferrar ran to find his captain. He knew that Captain Tanerton intended to put up at a small hotel in the Minories for the night.

To this hotel went Ferrar, and found Captain Tanerton. Tired with his evening's search after Pym, the Captain was taking some refreshment, before going up to Sir Dace Fontaine's—which he had promised, in Sir Dace's anxiety, to do. He received Ferrar's report—that Pym was dead—with incredulity: did not appear to believe it: but he betrayed no embarrassment, or any other guilty sign.

"Why, I came straight here from Pym," he observed. "It's hardly twenty minutes since I left him. He was all right then—except that he had been having more drink."

"Old Mother Richenough says, sir, that Pym and you had a loud quarrel."

"Says that, does she," returned the Captain carelessly. "Her ears must have deceived her, Mr. Ferrar."

"A quarrel and fight she says, sir. I told her I knew better."

Captain Tanerton took his cap and started with Ferrar for Ship Street, plunging into a reverie. Presently he began to speak—as if he wished to account for his own movements.

"When you left me, Mr. Ferrar—you know"—and here he exchanged a significant glance with his new first mate—"I went on to Ship Street, and took a look at Pym's room. A lamp was shining on the table, and his landlady had the window open, closing the shutters. This gave me an opportunity of seeing inside. Pym I saw; but not—not anyone else."

Again Captain Tanerton's tone was significant. Ferrar appeared

to understand it perfectly. It looked as though they had some secret understanding between them which they did not care to talk of openly. The Captain resumed.

"After fastening the shutters, Mrs. Richenough came to the door—for a breath of air, she remarked, as she saw me: and she positively denied, in answer to my questions, that any young lady was there. Mr. Pym had never had a young lady come after him at all, she protested, whether sister or cousin, or what not."

"Yes, sir," said Ferrar: for the Captain had paused.

"I went in, and spoke to Pym. But, I saw in a moment that he had been drinking again. He was not in a state to be reasoned with, or talked to. I asked him but one question, and asked it civilly: would he tell me where Verena Fontaine was. Pym replied in an unwilling tone; he was evidently sulky. Verena Fontaine was at home again with her people; and he had not been able, for that reason, to see her. Thinking the ship had gone away, and he with it, Verena had returned home early in the afternoon. That was the substance of his answer."

"But I—I don't know whether that account can be true, sir," hesitated Ferrar. "I was not sure, you know, sir, that it was the young lady; I said so——"

"Yes, yes, I understood that," interrupted the Captain quickly. "Well, it was what Pym said to me," he added, after a pause: "one hardly knows what to believe. However, she was not there, so far as I could ascertain and judge; and I left Pym and came up here to my hotel. I was not two minutes with him."

"Then—did no quarrel take place, sir?" cried Ferrar, thinking of the landlady's story.

"Not an angry word."

At this moment, as they were turning into Ship Street, Saxby, who seemed completely off his head, ran full tilt against Ferrar. It was all over, he cried out in excitement, as he turned back with them: the doctor pronounced Pym to be really dead.

"It is a dreadful thing," said the Captain. "And, seemingly, a mysterious one."

"Oh, it is dreadful," asserted young Saxby. "What will poor Miss Verena do? I saw her just now," he added, dropping his voice.

"Saw her where?" asked the Captain, taking a step backwards.

"In the place where I've just met you, sir," replied Saxby. "I was running past round the corner into the street, on my way home from Clapham, when a young lady met and passed me, going pretty nearly as quick as I was. She had her face muffled in a black veil, but I am nearly sure it was Miss Verena Fontaine. I thought she must be coming from Pym's lodgings here."

Captain Tanerton and his chief mate exchanged glances of intelligence under the light of the street gas-lamp. The former then turned to Saxby.

"Mr. Saxby," said he, "I would advise you not to mention this little incident. It would not, I am sure, be pleasant to Miss Verena Fontaine's friends to hear of it. And, after all, you are not sure that it was she."

"Very true, sir," replied Saxby. "I'll not speak of it again."

"You hear, sir," answered Ferrar softly, as Saxby stepped on to open the house door. "This seems to bear out what I said. And, by the way, sir, I also saw——"

"Hush!" cautiously interrupted the Captain—for they had reached the door, and Mrs. Richenough stood at it.

And what Mr. Ferrar further saw, whatever it might be, was not heard by Captain Tanerton. There was no present opportunity for private conversation: and Ferrar was away in the morning with the *Rose of Delhi.*

III.

After parting with Captain Tanerton on leaving the ship, I made my way to the Mansion House, took an omnibus to Covent Garden, and called at the Tavistock to tell Mr. Brandon of the return of the ship. Mr. Brandon kept me to dinner. About eight o'clock I left him, and went to the Marylebone Road to see the Fontaines. Coralie was in the drawing-room alone.

"Is it you, Johnny Ludlow!" she gaily cried, when old Ozias showed me in. "You are as welcome as flowers in May. Here I am, without a soul to speak to. You must have a game at chess with me."

"Your sister is not come home, then?"

"Not she. I thought it likely she would come, as soon as the ship's head was turned seaward—I told you so. But she has not. And now the ship's back again, I hear. A fine time you must have had of it!"

"We just had. But how did you know?"

"From papa. Papa betook himself to the docks this afternoon, to assure himself, I presume, that the *Rose of Delhi* was gone. And my belief is, Johnny, that he will work himself into a nervous fever," Coralie broke off to say, in her equable way, as she helped me to place the pieces. "When he got there, he found the ship was back again. This put him out a little, as you may judge; and something else put him out more. He heard that Vera went on board with Pym yesterday afternoon when the ship was lying in St. Katharine's Docks. Upon that, what notion do you suppose he took up?—I have first move, don't I?"

"Certainly. What notion did he take up?" The reader must remember that I knew nothing of Sir Dace's visit to the ship.

"Why, that Vera might be resolving to convert herself into a stow-away, and go out with Pym and the ship. Poor papa! He went searching all over the vessel. He must be off his head."

"Verena would not do that."

"Do it!" retorted Coralie. "She'd be no more likely to do it than to go up a chimney, as the sweeps do. I told papa so. He brought me this news when he came home to dinner. And he might just as well have stayed away, for all he ate."

Coralie paused to look at her game. I said nothing.

"He could only drink. It was as if he had a fierce thirst upon him. When the sweets came on, he left the table and shut himself in his little library. I sent Ozias to ask if he would have a cup of tea or coffee made; papa swore at poor Ozias, and locked the door upon him. When Verena does appear I'd not say but he'll beat her."

"No, no: not that."

"But, I tell you he is off his head. He is still shut up: and nobody dare go near him when he gets into a fit of temper. It is so silly of papa! Verena is all right. But this disobedience, you see, is something new to him."

"You can't move that bishop. It leaves your king in check."

"So it does. The worst item of news remains behind," added Coralie. "And that is that Pym does not sail with the ship."

"I should not think he would now. Captain Tanerton would not take him."

"Papa told me Captain Tanerton had caused him to be superseded. Was Pym very much the worse for what he took, Johnny? Was he very insolent? You must have seen it all?"

"He had taken quite enough. And he was about as insolent as a man can be."

"Ferrar is appointed to his place, papa says; and a new man to Ferrar's."

"Ferrar is! I am glad of that; very. He deserves to get on."

"But Ferrar is not a gentleman, is he?" objected Coralie.

"Not in one sense. There are gentlemen and gentlemen. Mark Ferrar is very humble as regards birth and bringing-up. His father is a journeyman china-painter at one of the Worcester china factories; and Mark got his learning at St. Peter's charity-school. But every instinct Mark possesses is that of a refined, kindly, modest gentleman; and he has contrived to improve himself so greatly by dint of study and observation, that he might now pass for a gentleman in any society. Some men, whatever may be their later advantages, can never throw off the common tone and manner of early habits and associations. Ferrar has succeeded in doing it."

"If Pym stays on shore it may bring us further complication," mused Coralie. "I should search for Verena myself then—and search in earnest. Papa and old Ozias have gone about it in anything but a likely manner."

"Have you any notion where she can be?"

"Just the least bit of notion in the world," laughed Coralie. "It flashed across me the other night where she might have hidden herself. I don't know it. I have no particular ground to go upon."

"You did not tell Sir Dace?"

"Not I," lightly answered Coralie. "We two sisters don't interfere with one another's private affairs. I did keep back a letter of Vera's; one she wrote to Pym when we first left home; but I have done no more. Here comes some tea at last!"

"I should have told," I continued in a low tone. "Or taken means myself to see whether my notion was right or wrong."

"What did it signify?—when Pym was going away in a day or two. Check to you, Johnny Ludlow."

That first game, what with talking and tea-drinking, was a long one. I won it. When Ozias came in for the tea-cups Coralie asked him whether Sir Dace had rung for anything. No, the man answered; most likely his master would remain locked in till bedtime; it was his way when any great thing put him out.

"I don't think I can stay for another game," I said to Coralie, as she began to place the men again.

"Are you in such a hurry?" cried Coralie, glancing round at the clock: which said twenty minutes to ten.

I was not in any hurry at all that night, as regarded myself: I had thought she might not care for me to stay longer. Miss Deveen and Cattledon had gone out to dinner some ten miles away, and were not expected home before midnight. So we began a fresh game.

"Why! that clock must have stopped!"

Chancing to look at it by-and-by, I saw that it stood at the same time—twenty minutes to ten. I took out my watch. It said just ten minutes past ten.

"What does it signify?" said Coralie. "You can stay here till twenty minutes to twelve if you like—and be whirled home in a cab by midnight then."

That was true. If——

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Coralie.

She was looking at the door with surprised eyes. There stood Verena, her bonnet on; evidently just come in.

Verena tripped forward, bent down, and kissed her sister. "Have you been desperately angry, Coral?" she lightly asked, giving me her hand to shake. "I know papa has."

"*I* have not been angry," was Coralie's equable answer: "but you have acted childishly, Verena. And now, where have you been?"

"Only in Woburn Place at Mrs. Ball's," said Verena, throwing off her bonnet, and bringing her lovely flushed face close to the light as she sat down. "When I left here that evening—and really, Johnny, I was sorry not to stay and go in to dinner with *you*," she broke off, with a smile—"I went straight to our old lodgings, to good old Mother Ball. 'They are frightful tyrants at home,' I said to her; 'I'm not sure but they'll serve me as Bluebeard did his wives; and I want to stay with you for a day or two.' There's where I have been all

the time, Coral; and I wondered you and papa did not come to look for me."

"It is where I fancied you might be," returned Coral. "But I only thought of it on Saturday night.—Does that mean check, Johnny?"

"Check and mate, mademoiselle."

"Oh, how wicked you are!"

"Mrs. Ball has been more careful of me than she'd be of gold," went on Vera, her blue eyes dancing. "The eldest daughter, Louise, is at home now: she teaches music in a school: and, if you'll believe me, Coral, the old mother would never let me stir out without Louise. When Edward Pym came up in the evening to take me for a walk, Louise must go with us. 'I feel responsible to your papa and sister, my dear,' the old woman would say to me. Oh, she was a veritable dragon."

"Was Louise with you when you went on board the *Rose of Delhi* yesterday afternoon?" cried Coralie, while I began to put away the chessmen.

Verena opened her eyes. "How *did* you hear of that? No, we tricked Louise for once. Edward had fifty things to say to me, and he wanted me alone. After dinner he proposed that we should go to afternoon service. I made haste, and went out with him, calling to Louise that she'd catch us up before we reached the church, and we ran off in just the contrary direction. 'I should like to show you my ship,' Edward said; and we went down in an omnibus. Mrs. Ball shook her head when we got back, and said I must never do it again. As if I should have the chance, now Edward's gone!"

Coralie glanced at her. "He *is* gone, I suppose?"

"Yes," sighed Vera. "The ship left the docks this morning. He took leave of me last night."

Coralie looked doubtful. She glanced again at her sister under her eyelids.

"Then—if Edward Pym is no longer here to take walks with you, Vera, how is it you came home so late to-night?"

"Because I have been to a concert," cried Vera, her tone as gay as a lark's. "Louise and I started to walk here this afternoon. I wanted you to see her; she is really very nice. Coming through Fitzroy Square, she called upon some friends of hers who live there, the Barretts—he is a professor of music. Mrs. Barrett was going to a concert to-night and she said if we would stay she'd take us. So we had tea with her and went to it, and they sent me home in a cab."

"You seem to be taking your pleasure!" remarked Coralie.

"I had such an adventure downstairs," cried Verena, dropping her voice after a pause of thought. "Nearly fell into the arms of papa."

"What—now?"

"Now; two minutes ago. While hesitating whether to softly tinkle the kitchen bell and smuggle myself in and up to my room, or

to storm the house with a bold summons, Ozias drew open the front door. He looked so glad to see me, poor stupid old fellow. I was talking to him in the passage when I heard papa's cough. 'Oh, hide yourself, Missee Vera,' cried Ozias, 'the master, he so angry;' and away I rushed into papa's little library, seeing the door of it open ——"

"He has come out of it, then!" interjected Coralie.

"I thought papa would go up-stairs," said Vera. "Instead of that, he came on into the room. I crept behind the old red window-curtains, and ——"

"And what?" asked Coralie, for Verena made a sudden pause.

"Groaned out with fright, and nearly betrayed myself," continued Verena. "Papa stared at the curtains as if he thought they were alive, and then and there backed out of the room. Perhaps he feared a ghost was there. He was looking so strange, Coralie."

"All your fault, child. Since the night you went away he has looked more like a maniac than a rational man, and acted like one. I have just said so to Johnny Ludlow."

"Poor papa! I will be good and tractable as an angel now, and make it up to him. And—why, Coralie, here are visitors."

We gazed in surprise. It is not usual to receive calls at bed-time. Ozias stood at the door showing in Captain Tanerton. Behind him was Alfred Saxby.

The Captain's manner was curious. No sooner did he set eyes on us than he started back, as if he thought we might bite him.

"Not here. Not the ladies. I told you it was Sir Dace, I wanted," he said in quick sentences to Ozias. "Sir Dace alone."

Ozias went back down the stairs, and they after him, and were shown into the library. It was a little room nearly opposite the front entrance, and underneath the room called the boudoir. You went down a few stairs to it.

Verena turned white. A prevision of evil seized her.

"Something must be the matter," she shivered, laying her hand upon my arm. "Did you notice Captain Tanerton's face?—I never saw him look like that. And what does he do here? Where is the ship? And oh, Johnny"—and her voice rose to a shriek—"where's Edward Pym?"

Alas! we soon knew what the matter was—and where Edward Pym was. Dead. Murdered. That's what young Saxby called it. Sir Dace, looking frightfully scared, started with them down to Ship Street. I went also; I could not keep away. George was to sit up for me at home if I were late.

"For," as Miss Deveen had said to me in the morning, laughingly, "there's no telling, Johnny, at what unearthly hour you may get back from Gravesend."

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

ABOUT NORWAY.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland."

Norwegian "Station."

THE system of travelling in Norway is simple and unpretending, befitting the necessities and ideas of a simple-minded people: one of whose greatest charms is an absence of that vulgar pretension which seeks every occasion for display and for surpassing its neighbours in magnificence. I do not believe anything of this sort exists in Norway.

The mode of travelling is easy and inexpensive, and, as far as it goes, well organized. But if Norway should become a popular country with tourists: and in this advanced age, when people go north, south, east and west; when there is a perpetual thirst for something new: new emotions, new impressions, anything for excitement: when even ladies visit the Nile for a little change of air, and ride over the Rocky Mountains in undaunted solitude, and with an admirable courage given to few women: when the North-East passage has become a thing of the past, and the course of the Gulf Stream is at man's disposal: when all these changes are taking place, surely a country so near our own shores as the iron-bound coast of "Gammle Norge," will have its day and generation; will be visited, lionized, inspected, criticized, devastated, and finally abandoned—who or what is constant in this world?—by the kings, lords, and commons of the earth.

But ere Norway has become a prey to the Philistines, let those who can, enjoy what remains of her original freshness. It will not last for ever. As long as the world turns round, the sun and moon run their course, and the law of gravitation keeps people comfortably upside down, like flies upon a ceiling, so long must effect follow upon cause. So when the pilgrims of pleasure begin to invade Norway, as they do Switzerland and other lands favoured by Nature, one of her great charms will have ceased to be.

True, the sea will still beat upon her shores with its everlasting refrain, chanting its endless hymn to Nature: a wordless Memento Mori which involuntarily directs the mind to that other sea, into whose turbulent waves each must plunge, on his way to the Dark Valley leading us to eternal sunlight. The sea, I say, will continue to beat upon these shores; the great hills, with their endless undulations, their cloud-capped peaks, will still be fraught with their solemn, chilling, mysterious, yet attracting silence and solitude; the wind will whisper its endless monotones to the pine forests: and the cattle "upon a thousand hills"—a true description of this land—will still answer to the jodel cry of the peasant: but the endless stream of travellers, with their irritating, restless ways, their loud tones, their misplaced remarks—the vacant laugh and foolish exclamation, so often breaking in upon the most solemn grandeur—will mock the dignity of this lonely country, and desecrate its repose.

And its people will change: their characters, aims, ambitions. It is, I repeat, effect following cause: as surely as the ebb and flow of the tide, the return of the swallows.

And yet it is impossible to go about Norway, and not doubt whether it ever can or will become popular with the great army of invaders. Beyond fishing—an art which appeals to the few and not the many—there is not a very great deal to take them there in comparison with other countries: and there is a great deal *not* there that may be found elsewhere.

The traveller has frequently to give up everything in the shape of comfort and luxuries: he must exert himself, too; often travel under difficulties; go through days of rain and cold, or submit to be detained at some lonely road-side station where life becomes a burden and man a misanthrope. There is no falling luxuriously into a corner of your comfortably built chariot, and having a nap if drowsiness overtakes you on the road. An upright position and sharp look-out keep you awake whether you will or not.

In these days, when, if there is no royal road to learning, people like one in travelling—and, more often than not, have it—hardships, and bodily exertion, and, it may sometimes happen, nothing but a supply of black bread at the end of a long day's journey, to appease a wolf-like appetite, are not universally attractive, and will never be universally sought.

Unless, indeed, things change. Things do change; and not always gradually. We often run from one extreme to the other. We cannot say that the world is what it was even twenty years ago. I heard two sermons yesterday from thoughtful, eloquent men. The one said we were awaking to a better state of things. The religion of twenty, a hundred, three hundred years past, would not do now. He was glad of it. The other held an opposite opinion. He considered that in many things religious we were retrograding:

going from bad to worse. This he regretted. Each might be right, but each looked at it from his own point of view. In either case it was clear that things were changing.

Ladies, again, now go up for Cambridge examinations: they make themselves conspicuous and invade man's provinces. They talk on platforms and "embrace" professions. Law and physic are open to them—and the Church, as tender lay sisters to attractive curates, who part their hair down the middle, perfume their handkerchiefs, and advise auricular confession. Ladies are quite at home in the dissecting room—and no doubt very much at home with the students. Probably they will tell you this is only another of their modes of "embracing" a profession. So be it. But our wiser forefathers-and-mothers had an old-fashioned idea that a girl's kingdom was her home, her best gifts grace and modesty, her greatest charm a feminine mind. It only remains for ladies, Leap-year or not, to propose to gentlemen. And then, where shall we find peace on the earth?

But at this rate, we shall not get through Norway. Digressions, like the poor little muffin bell, ought to be put down by act of parliament, for the benefit of the over-scrupulous reader.

The present system of posting in Norway—our paper reminds us of a sermon that is divided into a number of heads but does not vary its theme—would never do for an influx of visitors—the Philistines already alluded to. Therefore they had better keep away. There is a certain sound of luxurious dignity about this same word, posting, quite out of character with the thing itself, as found in Norway. In England it suggests a handsome carriage and pair; a post-boy gorgeous in livery and not infrequently great in self-esteem. In Norway it is a simple little carriole, with one small horse: rope "ribbons," which you must handle yourself: and very often a small post-boy, not yet in his teens by some years, who sits upon your luggage, and, for all you know, is amusing himself by making faces at you behind your back.

The price of posting is about threepence for every English mile. A Norwegian land mile is seven English miles, a fact that must not be forgotten by the traveller. Inexpensive as it sounds, and is, for one or two persons alone, it mounts up considerably if several are journeying together and the funds all flow from one exchequer. Thus a paterfamilias may be travelling with five animated appendages, his sisters, cousins, and a female aunt—which does not always mean, in these days, a *feminine* aunt. Or perhaps he is blessed with five well-grown olive branches. As they must travel with six carrioles, the sum mounts up to eighteen-pence per English mile: and as, the country being large, many miles have to be traversed, it becomes, in the end, an item not to be passed over in what our old friend Owen would have described to Bailie Nicol Jarvie as "the total of the whole."

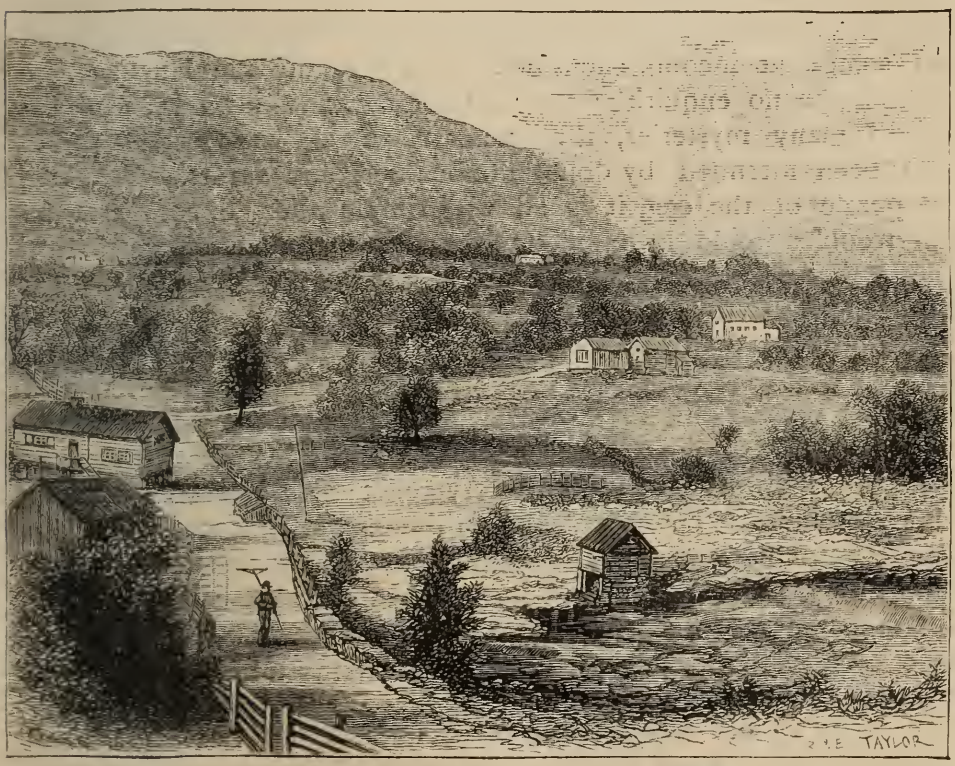
The "stations" are at distances of from seven to ten miles, more or less, from each other. If you are anxious to push on, you must take care to get up early in the morning so as to be in advance of other people on the road. Even then you may find that a party

Old Bridge in the Mountains.

of travellers have slept at a station farther on, and stolen a march upon you. In that case you may be detained one, two, or three, or even more hours at many stations. A fast station is bound to keep five horses, a slow station three: therefore if five people are ahead of you and all the horses are out, you must await their return.

This is often tedious work. It may be a station surrounded by

beautiful scenery, in which you are not unwilling to linger: but it may be the contrary, and the station itself comfortless, and destitute even of a glass of milk or beer. Moreover, in travelling, especially in Norway, each day has its appointed work: so many miles and stations for so many days: and this daily work cannot be accomplished if delays are frequent. Travelling is complicated and troublesome from the fact that you often have to time yourself to catch a steamer at a certain place; and as many of these steamers start only once or twice a week, arriving an hour after its departure means a delay of several days, and your plan is, like the world



On the Road to Laerdal.

upon occasion, thrown all out of joint. It is true that delays at stations may in a great measure be avoided by sending on before you "Forbud"—an avant-courier: but this does not always answer, and it is an additional cost that everyone does not care to encounter. It may often be noticed, with surprise at the uneven balance of mind, how travellers will waste considerable sums over really worthless objects bought in the shape of so-called "souvenirs," and will screw down their necessary expenses to the very last fraction, making themselves perfectly uncomfortable, and certainly not leaving behind them a character for generosity. This is as bad a fault as that lavishness so much practised by Americans and a certain class of English, which has done so much real harm abroad. Extremes are better avoided.

And now, en route.

We left Sörum on the Wednesday morning in company with kind good Mr. and Miss B., who headed the procession: Miss B.'s hood, it has already been recorded, occasionally swelling out to the resemblance and dimensions of a huge chimney cowl, turned hither and thither by the wind, as she gazed about her. They occupied the stolkjaer (pronounced stolecar), and we followed in carrioles. There were two post-boys for the three conveyances; and the next station, Lindheian, was at a distance of half a Norwegian mile, or three and a half English miles.

Now began our first experience of Norwegian "posting," their organized systems, their way of doing things. It was at first unfamiliar and somewhat incomprehensible. Not speaking the language, we could make no enquiries: and but for Mr. and Miss B., who explained many mysteries, the increase of our knowledge would have been attended by doubts, difficulties, and errors. Yet, like the puzzle of the egg, it is all very simple when once mastered. Our troubles would have chiefly arisen from the fact of starting on a somewhat unbeaten track, where things and people were in all their native simplicity.

Our present road was narrow but very picturesque. Close upon us to our left were the mountains, grand and beautiful, covered with trees and tangle, wild flowers and ferns adorning the banks by the road-side. Upon the slopes the wild strawberry plant grew and flourished in profusion, for it is very general in Norway as in many other mountainous countries. When the fruit is ripe, small children wander into the hills and gather them, and as the traveller passes the little road-side huts, out they come and hold them forth, hoping to tempt him out of a few örer. This strawberry selling and more direct systems of begging the Government desire may be encouraged as little as possible.

But the small strawberry urchins, their little faces and hands stretched forth in mute appeal—often a more eloquent pleading than words—formed a picture hard to be withstood. It was easy enough to pass the fruit—you cannot perform a sort of perambulating picnic in a carriole—but almost impossible not to satisfy the hope of a slight response shining in those bright eyes, and often very dirty faces. Nevertheless, it is unwise. One well-known village has been half ruined through an Englishman who some little time ago spent a few months there, fishing in the neighbourhood, and amused himself of an evening by throwing örer from his window to the boys in the road, for the slight pleasure of seeing them scramble. You cannot visit that place now without being worried by men and boys, who boldly come up and ask you to give them money.

As is often the case, after an early rainy morning, the day was brilliantly fine, and with the freshness of the air our spirits rose to fair-weather point. Mr. B. grew quite youthful and excited, but

irritated A. by what the latter looked upon as very slow driving and frequent pauses. Yet we went over the ground that morning as well as at any after period. A. had yet to learn that four miles an hour is generally the utmost speed to be got out of the horses. Anything much beyond this is immediately checked by the post-boy, in the most uncompromising manner.

The love of these people for their horses is a great feature in their character, and a good one. They treat them with the most tender kindness and consideration; and resent, as far as they dare or can, the slightest approach to illtreatment. Not that many would be guilty of cruelty; but a stranger to the country is apt to forget the hilly nature of the roads, and that frequent urging would soon put an end to these strong, willing, and amiable little animals: amongst whose faults, however, must be reckoned a general and unpleasant habit of shying.

We passed through the narrow lane amidst the mountains on either side, the wild tangles and the fir trees. To our right ran the noisy river, now near at hand, now winding farther away, but never quite parting company. Frothy, rippling, rushing, it seemed a living thing amidst dense solitude. Miss B.'s hood collapsed like a rent balloon, until at last she threw it off altogether, and cast round at us a half-shy, half-amused look, evidently aware that she now presented a more coquettish appearance. Dear lady! harmless vanity was evidently—and properly—not dead in her. Nor should it be in anyone. When not carried to excess it inspires a woman with the wish to please, whence flows the endeavour. With those frivolous young creatures whose lives are made up of overweening conceit, who pass their time in following the latest fashion and making themselves into a burlesque of life, we have no concern.

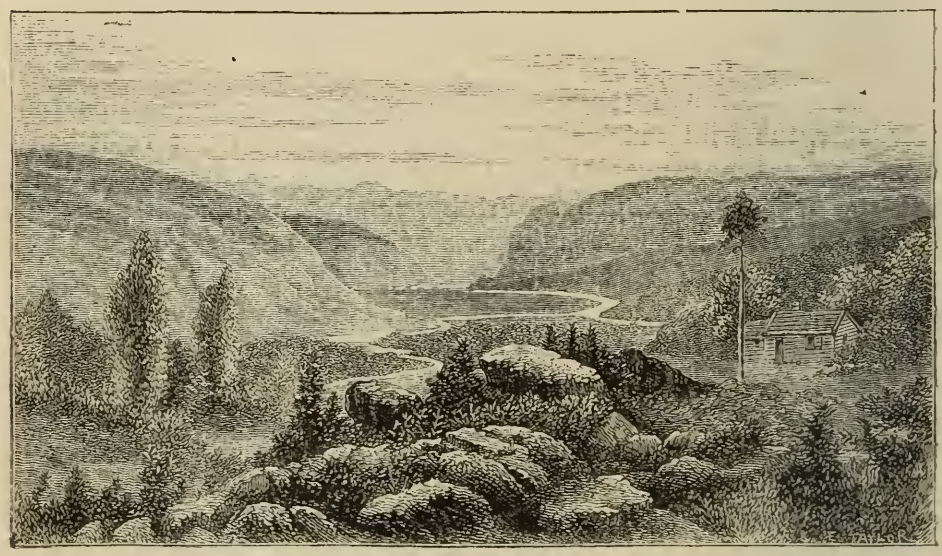
At the end of an hour's drive we reached Lindheian, alighted, entered the station, inspected the rooms upstairs and down, and enjoyed Miss B.'s amusement at the papers on the walls, where extraordinary battles were being for ever fought, guns were continually fired, and great slaughter lay around. Had we passed the night there, according to our original plan, we should doubtless have had nothing to regret. But the scenery around Sörum was much finer and more open: and even when night shuts out the mountains, we still feel and know that they are there, and the effect remains.

The people at Lindheian were civil, the landlord especially so. In front of the house rose the mountains, and up the slopes went a boy in search of horses. In a short time he brought them down from some invisible recess. The luggage was strapped on to the fresh carrioles—we had now one a-piece—the post-boys from Sörum were paid and dismissed, and nothing remained but to sign the book.

A day-book is kept at every station. Each traveller, before leaving, or the representative of a party, is compelled therein to put

down every name, and the number of horses engaged. By this means the succeeding party can ascertain how many horses are out, and misrepresentation on the part of the landlord becomes difficult. Some would make excuses if they could, and now and then try it on at night, in order to detain travellers and make money by them. Complaints against a station may also be recorded in these books, and the Lensmand—a sort of official constable or perambulating magistrate—in his appointed rounds, consults the book, takes note of them, and punishes the offenders.

In about twenty minutes from our arrival at Lindheian we were off again. Mr. B. being a Norwegian, could hasten their movements in a persuasive manner; but after we separated they kept us waiting



Saeter Home in the Mountains.

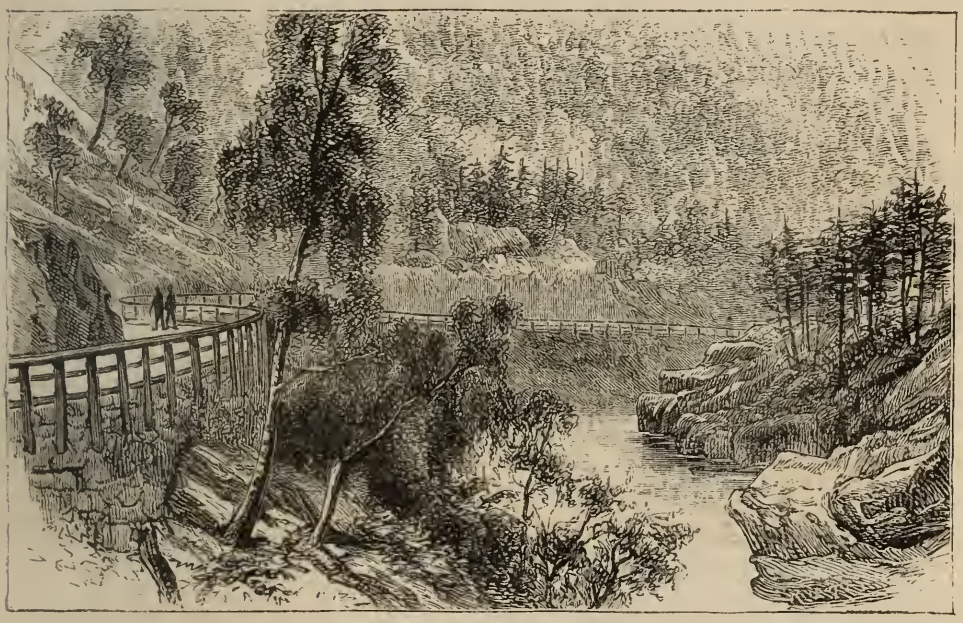
often an hour at some of the stations, when in five minutes everything could have been ready. And you are helpless. Offend them by the slightest remonstrance, or the most polite request for a little more speed, and they retaliate by keeping you waiting the longer.

Amongst the healthiest and most praiseworthy features in Norway are the new and excellent roads to be found all over the land, constructed with great skill, labour, and cost. In a poor country this is a very great work. Over and over again we were astonished at the good roads in hilly passes; roads passing by rushing torrents, or overhanging, as it were, the mountain-side, or skirting precipices and rendering smooth and pleasant a journey that would otherwise, have been lengthened and laborious.

As we left Lindheian, a cavalcade of four carrioles, with one lady to enliven the party, the old road might be traced going up the mountain-side, steep and rugged, making in the old days a toil of pleasure—as all travelling then was in Norway. It was now used as

a saeter path, said Mr. B.: conducting to the summer homes in the mountains, answering to the Swiss alm, when the cattle are away grazing, and the girls or the young men are looking after them. The saeters are small, rude huts, peat smoked, often blackened inside and out, constructed of logs and planks of wood, and affording sufficient shelter for the warm seasons and the long days.

We bowled along, more figuratively than literally. No sooner did we get up speed, than the short bit of down hill or level road abruptly ceased, and Mr. B. coming to a dead stand at the bottom of the next ascent, would bring up the remainder of the party with a suddenness dangerous to an upright position. For the Norwegian horses have this peculiarity: that the first horse regulates the speed,



The Baegna.

and the others follow suit. If he goes slowly, so do they; if he goes fast, they, too, become more lively. The one horse will have his nose as close to the carriole in front of him as possible. Now and then, indeed, the advance guard feels a sudden dig in his back, and on looking round is confronted by the horse's mouth, which is unpleasantly affectionate in its demonstrations. It is troublesome: for whilst the foremost horse has continually to be urged onwards, the other horses require quite as much to be held in. The occupier of the front carriole thus fills an unthankful position. To those behind he appears to be a very slow coach indeed; arresting speed, spoiling fun, and dragging onwards in a miserable manner. He is a victim, almost a martyr; his followers constantly urging him on to greater exertions, which are perfectly unavailing. He feels that he is momentarily losing the good-will of his companions. Four miles an hour is what few men appreciate. It is no better than

walking, say they, and really almost as tiring. What they like is to go ahead, and rush through a country. Here is a fall and there a hill; but one fall or one hill very much resembles another, they consider. The only real pleasure in travelling, they argue, is the excitement of getting along, passing quickly from place to place, and having a sort of race with time.

Unlucky Mr. B. came in that morning for his share of the burden. A. at last got tired of the walking pace and frequent stoppages, and declared he would take the lead. But, unfortunately, though his horse had kept uncomfortably close up, it was so humble-minded that it absolutely refused to pass and go in front. For once A. had to make a virtue of necessity and practise resignation.

Well he might, indeed, for the scene was of a picturesque beauty uncommon to English eyes. The road wound in and out amongst the hills, which were broken up into chains and undulations; some bleak and bare, and presenting a mere rock surface; others covered with firs that looked fresh and green after the morning rain, less gloomy than usual in the dazzling air and bright sunshine. Those wonderful pine forests, the very sombreness of whose aspect makes them so unchangeably grand. Gloomy and sad they may be; there is not the rustle and sparkle about them that you find in the spreading and more friendly branches of the elm; but they are very constant, never changing, ever the same.

During the whole of that ten miles' drive we never met a being or passed a creature, biped or quadruped. Solitude, eternal solitude seemed to reign—utter, uninterrupted solitariness; as much on the road below as on the mountain heights. I have never felt so out of the world, in a sense so cast adrift upon an unknown, uninhabited land, as during that first day's journeying. There were neither land-marks nor sign-posts to guide us: in a few hours we should have parted company with kind, obliging, sympathetic Mr. and Miss B., and then, thrown on our own resources, we must resign ourselves to whatever destiny might have in store for us.

At length we turned out of the road, to the right, and in a small open space, a hundred yards or so down, we came to the station of Storsveen.

I then thought, and looking backward, I think still, that this station must be one of the roughest and most primitive in all Norway. Were I to see it again, after the experience which followed of other stations, I might form a different opinion, though I fancy not. Anything more dreary and desolate, more aboriginal than it appeared, could not be conceived. It stood in the midst of this small plain, surrounded by the mountains, no sound save the flowing of the river on its course; no house in sight but the station itself; not even a bird to break the mournful sense of stagnation. We seemed verily to have reached the end of all things and of the world.

But Mr. B.'s unfailing youthful ardour did not forsake him even

here. It was equal to any emergency, and seemed to take things as they came; being, like a second Mark Tapley, most jovial under the severest strain. He sprang lightly out of his carriole, cut a caper in the air to restore suspended circulation, and then came up and asked us how we found ourselves, and what we thought of Storsveen, of carrioles, and of all things Norwegian. It was impossible to resist this light-hearted nature, who took everybody under his wing, and had patted all the little boys' heads on the journey from Heen to Sörum: and so, stimulated by his good example, we too skipped gracefully out of our carrioles, and going up to Miss B., assisted her to unpack and alight from her vehicle. It was delightful to witness the pleasure with which Mr. B. received any attentions paid to his sister—who was just one of those persons to whom it was impossible *not* to be attentive, and even solicitous for her comfort.

Storsveen is not a sleeping station, as far as I know; I may be mistaken. But I do know that I should not like to sleep in the midst of that appalling solitude, as far removed from the world as if I were in the centre of the Great Sahara. Accommodation was of the most limited description. It was past two o'clock, and a not very sumptuous breakfast in the early morning had paved the way for a ravenous-like appetite. Oh for a dish of that fine trout Miss B. had shown me with such pride at ten o'clock! If we had only known what awaited us! If only in this life we could always see the end from the beginning and foretell the future!—how much good would be done, what mistakes avoided! But we could not see even a day before us, and so the trout were left in peace at Sörum. Here we found nothing forthcoming but a supply of black bread, a little goat's cheese, and some not especially good beer. When we asked for further supplies, the mistress of the establishment looked vacantly at us, then mysteriously whispered to her husband, and finally shook her head in a melancholy way. It was evident that here, to ask and to have was by no meams the rule of the house.

Black bread is of two kinds in Norway. There is one sort that is brown, sour, and yet not altogether unpalatable; and there is a stage farther on, to which limits English appetite at any rate cannot extend. A. could manage neither one nor the other, and throughout Norway eked out a bare existence upon hard biscuit. As for goat's cheese, here and in other parts of Norway it looked and smelt exactly like hard, brown soap: I never had the courage to taste it. Miss B., whose capacities for fasting were great, refused anything in the way of refreshment: necessity compelled us to be less dainty.

The house, as all these stations are, was built of wood. We entered a rough, long room almost bare of furniture, which sent forth a chilling influence, and found the day-book. Then we went into the kitchen, which was strewn with green branches of trees, a frequent custom in Norway, which sent forth a sweet, resinous perfume. In the large chimney-corner, to the left hand as we entered, a rough,

stalwart handmaiden was boiling something in a cauldron—what, we stayed not to enquire. In this out-of-the-world spot it was as well not to be too inquisitive.

Above the outhouse to the right of the main building, was a small bell-tower, or shed, and the bell is principally used to call the people down from the mountains. At such times the tones vibrate through the air and penetrate to distant parts of the hills, sounding an alarm sufficient to arouse from their long sleep those who are quietly resting after the burden and heat of their little day in the churchyard hard by. Not that the bell was a large one, but in these quiet neighbourhoods, these great solitudes, sounds are tenfold magnified.

The people of the station, to be just, were far better than their quarters, and were anxious to do their utmost for us during our short stay amongst them. But you cannot make bricks without straw, and what they did not possess, the best will in the world was unable to produce. So, with neither time, inclination, nor inducement to linger, we got ready again for the road. We had still far to travel, and at our present rate it was difficult to say at what hour we should reach our destination. One thing, however, we had already learned: that the system of travelling in Norway was never made for those who are pressed for time.

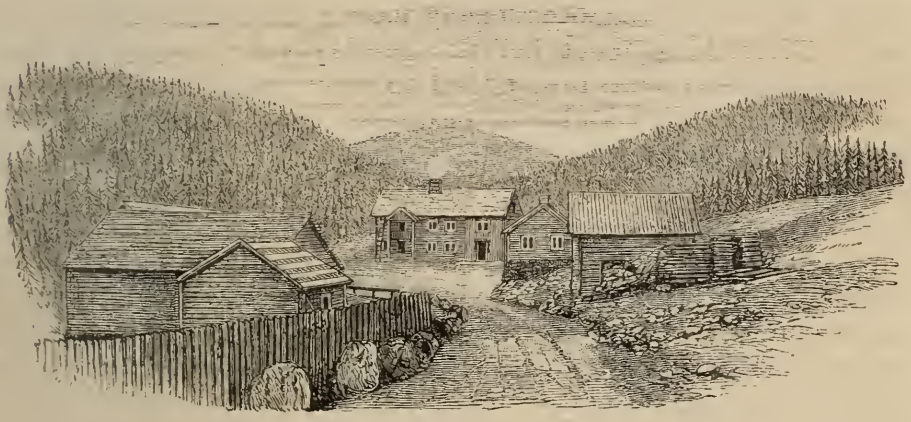
So we paid the post-boys from Lindheian, watched them depart with their empty carrioles, and then ourselves prepared to follow suit. We left the kitchen with its pleasant smell of pinewood, and the girl who had never moved from her mysterious ministrations at the cauldron, swallowed a little of their black bread and beer, and went out. Mr. B. superintended the strapping the luggage, about which he was as anxious as a lady is for the safe keeping of her bonnet-box; made them envelop our portmanteau in a sack to protect it from the mud on the road: and away we, too, went on our journey.

We had seven miles to travel to the next station, Vold: seven miles of the same fine scenery, the same grand, utter solitude, the vast hills and lonely mountain heights; and then, after nearly two hours, another stage was accomplished.

Vold was very differently situated from Storsveen. We had not to go out of the way to reach it, but found it perched on the roadside in a mountain nook, surrounded and overhung, as it seemed, by the trees and tangles that grew upon the slopes. There was a close unpleasant feeling about it of being shut in; a want of air; a longing to get out into more expansive quarters. The house itself was picturesque; it was built something after the style of a Swiss châlet, and we entered by the gable end. But the people were less obliging and civil than those of Storsveen. The spot seemed to breathe a veritable air of mystery, which no doubt was all imagination, but had all the effect of reality upon nerves beginning to get tired with the long, unfamiliar drive, the slow progress, in itself wearisome, the want of one's ordinary food. I simply could not have stayed the night in that place. A ner-

vousness took possession of me, which no one suspected; that kind of feeling which passes on to presentiment, and which made me heartily respond to Mr. B.'s proposal that we should not linger here longer than was necessary. Had we done so; dined and slept there; no doubt we should have found Vold comfortable, and the people attentive; but our journey was far from being over for the day; time was precious; horses and carrioles could be ready at once, whilst to prepare dinner would take an hour. So again we made martyrs of ourselves, and went on our way—fasting.

Once more, therefore, and for the last time all four together, we started. The road became still more wild and picturesque than heretofore. The Baegna now went rushing and roaring in turbulent haste and strong force over its rocky bed, deepening as the road ascended. Trees overhung us; masses of tangle, slopes of wild flowers and the delicate green of the oak-fern continued to abound. Rugged grandeur



NEAR SORUM.

surrounded us wherever the eye rested. In about a quarter of an hour we reached the bridge over the Baegna, where we were to part with our kind friends. Our road would now lie to the left; theirs onwards to the right. Miss B. was on her way to spend a month or two with friends, who—it seemed to us—must live on the very confines of the earth: and Mr. B., leaving his sister in safe keeping, would continue his journey to Bergen. There he hoped we should meet again.

It chanced that we never did meet again. And here, in taking leave of them, though these pages may not come under their notice, I would express my gratitude for their more than kindness and consideration towards two travellers in a strange land: and what was still more embarrassing, in the midst of an unknown tongue. So far they had made all the difference to our journey; future progress would, in consequence, be comparatively plain sailing.

We fell, too, soon after this, into the more beaten tracks of travellers, where complications need not be; where the station

people often spoke a little English: and travellers' wants were so much alike, that without being uttered they were understood. But so desolate and forlorn, so out of the way and out of the world, so leading to chaos and confusion seemed that first day's experience, that, without the support of Mr. B.'s kindly guidance and Miss B.'s bright countenance to enliven and relieve these apparently untrodden paths, I doubt if we should have had the courage to proceed. Untrodden paths indeed! From eleven in the morning until five in the afternoon, when we parted, we passed no creature on the road, heard no sound of voices save our own, saw no sign of life, with the exception of the slight breaks at the stations, and the few people inhabiting them.

We parted from our friends at five o'clock, at the foot of the Baegna bridge, through which the water was rushing with passionate haste and loud noise, foam upon foam. Mr. B. was full of farewells, and shook hands at least a dozen different times, and Miss B. waved her hand and occasionally looked back until quite out of sight. Everything about her was gentle; voice, step, movement, and expression; and this, added to what must once have been considerable beauty, and was beauty still, made one wonder why, in the years gone by, she had not ceased to be an unappropriated blessing.

So they departed and we saw them no more. I had like to have taken leave of Norway at the same time, and of life with it. Nothing would satisfy my horse but that he must follow the carrioles containing our lost companions. Endeavours to make him take the proper road were useless. He backed, plunged, reared, turned round, and was within an inch of precipitating himself and his driver over the steep banks into the rushing water below. For one moment I realized the feeling of a near and overwhelming danger: my heart stood still; and, luckily, so did the horse. Then his mind took a sudden turn for the better; he put his head down and plunged to the left—the left road proving the right road in this instance, though it is not always so through life. Away he dashed, and A.'s quadruped came trotting after. We might have compared ourselves to the Children in the Wood: children of a larger growth, it is true: but here were forests innumerable, if not the leaves and the robins: whilst those unhappy little beings, whose fate has rent the heart and harrowed the feelings of childhood from generation to generation, could not have found themselves in greater solitude and a more forsaken country than now surrounded us on all sides.

DAYLESFORD.

A STORY OF OXFORD DAYS.

I.

DAYLESFORD.

I WENT to Oxford at nineteen, pretty well acquainted with books, but as ignorant as the merest child of any knowledge of the world. My father, a country clergyman, who had led a most secluded life, and married late, had a horror of public schools, for he had been wretched at Eton. He had, therefore, educated me himself; and I had thus no opportunity of gathering from intercourse with society any of the advantages of which my education deprived me: for we lived in a small West-Country village, in a neighbourhood purely agricultural.

My father sent me to his own college, St. Ambrose's. Having been brought up at home, I had, naturally, no school acquaintances ready to welcome me into their circle. A few soon called on me, and these not of the best set or style. I was, fortunately, fastidious in my tastes, and contracted no intimacies: nor, with one exception, did I feel inclined to make any.

During my first term I saw a man, called Daylesford, who took my fancy mightily at first sight. He was a couple of years my senior: tall, handsome, and dark-haired, with sparkling blue eyes, and the frankest and pleasantest smile I had ever beheld. It lit up his whole face like a sunbeam, and disclosed teeth of the utmost regularity and whiteness. I soon found out that he was the hero of St. Ambrose's; a kind of Admirable Crichton: an adept at all sorts of muscular exercises, and invariably surrounded by a troop of friends. Asking my next-door neighbour in Hall one day, a reading man of the name of Boniface, if he knew anything of Daylesford, I got for reply the curt rejoinder that "*He* didn't; and what was more, *I* had better not."

Boniface lived on my staircase, and we had a speaking acquaintance, so I asked for an explanation of the sentiment to which he had just given utterance.

"He's one of those swells who ruin the 'Varsity by coming here to idle and make others idle," rejoined Boniface, glumly.

"He's the pleasantest looking fellow, nevertheless, it has ever been my lot to set eyes on," I said: for I did not like Boniface, and I felt uncommonly attracted to Daylesford.

As my first term drew near its end, I began to get well acquainted with the state of politics at St. Ambrose's, though I seemed no nearer to an acquaintance with Daylesford. I found affairs in a very different state from that which I had expected from my father's account of his college.

In his day, the Warden had been the Honourable and Reverend Fulke Greville, a learned and highly born man, who had died a couple of years before my time, at a patriarchal age, and had been succeeded by a head of a very different stamp—Dr. Lee, a self-made man of low birth, a Radical and an Evangelical; all the traditions of St. Ambrose's were Tory, High Church, and aristocratic. The new Warden complained bitterly, and not without reason, perhaps, of the state in which he found the college discipline: but the endeavours he made to amend it were not crowned with the success they doubtless deserved. When I joined it, St. Ambrose's was fast verging towards a condition of open mutiny; and I gathered from reports that my friend Daylesford was head and front of the offending. Night after night some piece of mischief was cleverly and quietly effected, culminating, one dark November evening, in the severing of the chapel bell rope. The outrage was discovered early the next morning, and the whole college was gated—i.e., confined within its walls—until the perpetrators should confess, or be given up by their accomplices.

The sense of honour kept every man silent, although no one had any doubt as to the chief offender. Gated we remained for a whole fortnight, during which time the most absurd rumours were rife in Oxford. It was said the St. Ambrose's men were all sent down, and that the building was to be turned into a workhouse or a lunatic asylum.

Towards the end of what was our term of imprisonment, there occurred a tremendous fall of snow; it descended heavily and without intermission for forty-eight hours. The second night, just as I was going to bed, a man who lived on my staircase, and who had therefore called on me, came into my room.

"Such a lark, Carrington!" he cried. "We are going to block up the archway between the quads to-night, so that Bogie"—the Warden's pet name—"and all his Dons will find themselves gated with a vengeance in their turn. Come and help us, there's a good fellow. Every man in the college, except Boniface and half a dozen other sneaks, is going to join us."

At nineteen one dreads the epithet of "sneak," and needs but little inducement to aid a frolic. I turned out into the snow. A most whimsical scene presented itself in the inner quad. All noise of footfalls masked by the thickness of the snow, some thirty men, silent as ghosts, were working with a perseverance and alacrity worthy of the noblest cause in piling faggots, stored up for the winter supply of fuel, at each end of the archway which separated the great quad, the residence of the Warden and Fellows, from the little, in which the undergrads were located. The wood well and closely packed, all interstices were filled, and their exterior facings well covered, with a thick coating of frozen snow. That done, as dawn began to break, Daylesford, who was here, there, and every-

where, the ruling spirit of the scene, proposed to make a snow man, in the outward likeness of the Warden. The idea was greeted with a pantomime of delight: in half an hour a monstrous image was erected, of short stature and protuberant build, clothed in black inexpressibles, a rusty long black gown, and a battered old cap, all the very gear of the original—how procured, no persuasion could induce Daylesford to reveal. Our mirth partly exhausted, we were all back in bed before either authorities or officials were stirring, having laid the foundation of precious colds, but with no regret except that the geography of our situation would preclude our seeing the first ebullitions of the fury of the Dons at beholding our handiwork.

It transpired afterwards that the porter, emerging from his lodge to ring the chapel bell—the rope had been mended—was the first to discover the blockade: and report further alleged that the bloated functionary stood and swore aloud for full five minutes by the clock before he could summon self-command to go and apprise the Warden of the news. Rumour was grimly silent as to the manner in which he received the intelligence, but, once afloat, the whole governing body soon heard it, and turned out. At first incredulous, they were forced to receive the evidence of their own eyes.

Labourers were procured from the town, and their work seemed easy: but the faggots proved an unexpected and most formidable impediment. By twelve o'clock, a passage was cleared; and the porter, swelling with rage, made known to the occupants of the little quad—all found hard at work, each man in his own room—that the Warden desired their presence in the Hall at one o'clock.

We presented ourselves accordingly, and were confronted by the whole posse of offended authorities. The Warden, infuriated almost beyond control, informed us in the curtest terms that unless the ringleader or leaders were given up at once, every man in the college should be expelled. If he or they were resigned to justice, the chief culprit or culprits only should be punished with this extreme rigour. Not a word answered him. There were several men present who had refused to join us: two or three who had been utterly ignorant of the projected example. Everyone's suspicions pointed, nevertheless, to Daylesford as chief offender; but the sense of comradeship kept every one silent. The Warden's brow grew even blacker. The Dean whispered to him.

"Go, gentlemen," the Warden thundered, laying a truly vicious stress on the substantive. "The Dean begs that you may be given half an hour for deliberation. At the end of that period bring me your ultimatum, and let me counsel you to be wise in time."

We went, and held a meeting, at which the question, to yield or not to yield, was put to the vote. The Noes had an overwhelming majority. The result conveyed to the Warden, every man in college received notice to be out of Oxford before twelve next day.

The afternoon passed swiftly onwards, and it became gradually more and more evident that a strong sentiment of anger and revolt against the majority pervaded many of the Ayes. No audible expression was at first given to their feelings; but their faces told the tale. And the wrath was not unreasonable: there were men among them to whom expulsion would be ruin. As nightfall approached, murmurs found vent in words. Suddenly the news flew about that the sentence was repealed; Daylesford had given himself up. He had wished and offered to do this from the first; but his popularity was so great that a majority of the men had dissuaded him from the sacrifice. The murmurs of the dissentients, however, were not long in reaching his ears, and without communicating with anyone, he went straight to the Warden.

All other offenders were forgiven, and Daylesford was summarily expelled. And thus vanished all chance of my making his acquaintance.

II.

MARY.

My father was terribly concerned when I told him at Christmas how nearly my Oxford career had escaped a most summary conclusion. To an old University man the sentence of expulsion is the most awful of penalties. It had its terrors for myself; for I was ambitious, though my father was a rich man, the Squire, as well as the Rector, of Fairford Parva.

Matters at St. Ambrose's appeared to have come to a crisis with Daylesford's expulsion, for they progressed peaceably enough the next term. I settled myself to my work with a will: getting through "smalls" early, and through "mods" with success sufficient to encourage me to work still harder for the final prize of a first-class. I had not much to distract my mind from my work, for I made no intimate friends in college, and the only acquaintances I acquired without were people who rather encouraged than interfered with my progress. My father ascertained by accident, when I had been some months at St. Ambrose's, that an old college friend of his, the Reverend Septimus Thane was Rector of St. Ingulphus' at Oxford. He wrote to him; and the Rector called upon me, and asked me to his house.

I found him a kind, gentlemanly old man, a bookworm of that good old High Church school, of which the late excellent Bishop of L—— was one of the brightest luminaries. In my visits I saw more of his daughter than of himself. At this date Charlotte Thane was a woman of two or three-and-thirty years of age, looking it, and not ashamed of it: a model helpmeet for a parish priest, and the best of daughters; an excellent housewife, and a quick, clever, well cultivated woman. In person she was tall, full, and well-made, with the most perfect arms and hands I ever saw; pale-faced, dark-haired, with a bright, serene expression. She would have made the most admirable of wives: as

it was, she was the most admirable of friends that a raw boy could well hope to have; for she had the sense, the self-possession, the experience of a woman of the world, and all that warm-hearted quiet kindness of manner which wins the confidence of the young and shy. I used to tell her she reminded me of Macaulay's exquisite description of Madame de Maintenon; her character was like "that tender green upon which the eye loves to repose."

Many of my leisure evening hours were spent in Miss Thane's company; hours utterly undisturbed by any dreams of romance or passion, for she was too matter-of-fact, too straightforward, to have the slightest grain of coquetry in her disposition. The Rectory was one of the pleasantest haunts imaginable. One of those old-fashioned town houses standing in a street, but opening at the back with so charming a surprise into a green old-fashioned garden: having wainscoted rooms within, and trees old as the city walls without; a dwelling perfect both in summer and winter to my mind.

A day or two after the beginning of my second May Term, I went to pay Miss Thane my first call in that term. I opened the hall door according to my wont, and looked into the drawing and dining rooms on either side of the hall. Finding both empty, I walked out into the garden. There, sitting on a rustic seat under the shade of an umbrageous elm, I saw two figures where I had been wont to see but one. The second was that of a girl some fourteen years Miss Thane's junior; a girl with rippling fair hair, and sea-blue eyes, a broad, low white forehead, and features piquante and most expressive, if not perfectly regular. She was slight, but her figure, of middle height, was perfectly well moulded, and she had the smallest hands in the world, which were engaged in tying up a bouquet of early roses, from whose lustre a tinge of colouring seemed to have been imparted to her cheek.

"My friend, Harry Carrington, Mary; Miss Neville," said Charlotte, introducing us as I came slowly forward, hampered by a hesitation and a bashfulness which had never before troubled me in the peaceful precincts surrounding Miss Thane. Miss Neville held out her hand; Charlotte with her tranquil smile made room for me between them on the seat.

"I did not know you expected a visitor, Miss Thane," was my first sapient remark.

"Nor did I when I saw you last, six weeks ago. But since you went down, I have been spending a week from home, marvellous to relate, and I found out that some distant connections of Papa's lived in the next parish to the one in which I was staying. The renewal of the acquaintance has led to Mary's visit."

"I have been so long anxious to see Oxford," said Miss Neville, "and Miss Thane says the May Term is the best. It is so kind of her to invite me."

"Do you find it all that you expected?" I asked.

"I am sure I shall: but I have only driven from the station here, and you know what a drive that is. I came last night."

I looked eagerly at Miss Thane. She anticipated the expression of my thoughts.

"You will show us everything, will you not?" she said. "It is so many years since I have lionized Oxford, that I daresay I shall find much that is new to myself. I should be a most imperfect guide."

"Let us begin to-morrow, and with St. Ambrose's," I cried.

"Are you at St. Ambrose's? And have you been there long?" asked Miss Neville, fixing her blue eyes upon me, the colour deepening in her cheeks.

"I am. I have been there more than a year and a half," I answered.

The next day we began our tour of inspection with St. Ambrose's, in which Miss Neville took an interest which delighted me. It is a jolly old place, dear to the heart of every one of its sons. There are colleges in Oxford far more grand in outline, and far more perfect in detail, yet she said she liked nothing else half so well, after I had shown her everything. At no time could Oxford, its river, its buildings, its trees, look more lovely than in the soft glow and tender glory of May time, and a May such as we had that year.

When we had seen everything that we could see,—and I made the most of the sights—we finished our round where we had begun it. I gave a luncheon in my rooms at St. Ambrose's; the parti-carré—the two Thanes, Miss Neville, and myself—was perfect in my mind as to numbers.

After luncheon the discussion fell upon the approaching gaieties which always end the May Term, and I told them that I should expect their presence at the theatricals which were to take place during Commemoration, at St. Ambrose's.

"Oh! how delightful!" cried Mary, at whom I looked, though I spoke to Miss Thane.

"I wish we could come," said Charlotte, earnestly, speaking low. "But, Mary, dear, we should want a chaperon, and I know no one who is likely to go. We have always lived so very quietly, you know."

Mary's face fell deplorably. "Wouldn't your papa take us?" she whispered. Mr. Thane, buried in a book as usual, heard nothing of what passed.

"I should be afraid to ask him," his daughter said. "Glare and noise always make him ill, and it would be late for him."

She relapsed into silence, and thought a few minutes, her brow knit. Then her kind face brightened.

"Do you think your mother would come and stay with us for Commem., Mary? She could chaperon you then to everything. Harry and I would get you tickets."

"You would go too," interrupted Mary.

"If I were wanted, but not else. My days of gaiety are over,"

said Miss Thane, smiling her moonlight smile. "Write to your mother this evening, Mary."

She wrote; and an acceptance came, followed in due time by a stately, middle-aged grey-haired dame, of portly and most majestic bearing; par excellence a British matron of the upper ten thousand. She was gracious to a degree to me: but I did not for one instant suppose she would have noticed me, had not my father's name been enrolled among Burke's Landed Gentry, as well as in the Clergy List. However, I was not critical, for Mrs. Neville's good-will was the thing I desired most to gain, after the affections of her daughter.

And of Mary's love I began to have hopes. She was sometimes pensive now, and at first she had been invariably gay: her colour would come and go with tremulous suddenness. Her eyes would sometimes fall before a glance: and they had been wont to look straight into yours with a piercing blue lustre.

The campaign of Commemoration began on a Friday, with a concert at Exeter: on Saturday the Amateur Concert took place, in the Town-hall. Show Sunday was devoted to Magdalen and New College Chapels, and to the evening promenade in the Broad Walk. On Monday there was a flower-show in Trinity Gardens in the morning: a Grand Operatic Concert in the Theatre in the afternoon; and the procession of boats and a ball at Christ Church in the evening. On Tuesday the Freemasons' Fête was given in the gardens of St. John's, and in the evening there were the St. Ambrose' Theatricals. The next day we went to the Theatre in the morning: and were to go to the Freemasons' ball in the evening at the Town-hall:—it was some years ago, and the Corn Exchange was not then finished.

We had been to everything. Mrs. Neville had chaperoned Mary to all the evening amusements, and to as many of the daylight festivities as her strength could compass. Miss Thane had given her the sanction of her presence at the chapel services, and at the less interesting of the out-door fêtes. I had accompanied or joined them everywhere: and, despite a most robust constitution and the sustaining power of love, I was almost done up. But Mary seemed endowed with superhuman vigour: her spirits were unflagging, her energies untiring. Not until the afternoon of the Wednesday, the last day of Commem., one of pouring rain, and without any daylight engagement after early morning to occupy us, could she be got to confess that she was in the least tired. Then she allowed to Charlotte that she was certain she should be able to dance nothing that night but round dances, for she could not put her foot flat to the ground.

Miss Thane betrayed her to Mrs. Neville, who bore down upon Mary and myself, seated in the drawing-room. "To ensure that her daughter should take some rest," she said, she turned me out, with orders not to show myself again at the Rectory, till seven, the hour fixed for the very high tea which was to reinforce us for the exertions of the coming ball.

III.

DELILAH?

I WENT to my rooms, and tried to rest, but I could not. My mind was in a whirl. Mary had told me that morning, that they were to go home on the Friday after a day of repose, and I had determined that I would tell her what was in my heart before I let her go. Should I tell her that night? or would the tranquillity of the peaceful rectory garden be a better theatre for a love scene, than the crowded ball room?

I could not make up my mind. I would trust to chance, I resolved, springing off the sofa on which I had been tossing for two hours and more. I went to the window. It had left off raining heavily, and a cool mist was falling. I looked at my watch; it was six. An hour's walk and a pipe would refresh me more than enforced quiescence in a small, hot, low room, and I turned out straightway.

Drizzling as it was, the High Street was full of sightseers, and in my present mood, the only endurable alternative to Mary's society was solitude. The rustle, chat, and laughter of strangers was intolerable. I bethought me, consequently, of the quiet walk through Mesopotamia, then newly made: it would afford me a circuit of about two miles from St. Ambrose's to the Rectory, and, taken leisurely, would bring me to St. Ingulphus' in time for tea. I sauntered along, my hands thrust deep into my pockets, my head down, a pipe between my teeth. I got through the distance without meeting a living soul. Suddenly I felt that the sense of solitude was broken. I looked up; and beheld, not five yards from me, Mary Neville hanging affectionately on the arm of Daylesford. I had not seen him for a year and a half, but I could no more mistake him than her. The lapse of time had but made him handsomer, more distinguished looking: a long and silky black moustache now gave a manlier touch to his dark and aristocratic countenance.

Mary was talking earnestly; her face was upraised eagerly to his: an expression of tender and appealing affection softening, to the gentlest entreaty, the piquante grace of her delicate features. He was looking down on her, half persuaded, it was plain, for love of her, but yet most unwilling to yield. Neither of them perceived me till I was passing them: then Mary turned her head suddenly, and met my indignant gaze. I raised my hat; she had the effrontery to bow with a would-be saucy air, but she had the decency to blush, and that violently. Daylesford gave me a careless glance, attracted by my movement: but there was neither recognition nor interest in his eyes.

This, then, was the cause of her attachment to St. Ambrose's: this, the reason she had lingered over every detail, and had penetrated

every corner free to visitors. "She had long wanted to see Oxford." No doubt she had! I had left her to rest, and here she was, a mile from home, braving the weather, and disregarding her extreme fatigue, for the purpose of an interview with Daylesford: an interview evidently clandestine, for I had never heard her mention his name.

I ground my teeth in savage fury at her perfidy: in unavailing bitterness to think how vainly I could ever have hoped to cope with Daylesford. His was just the style and person that would infallibly attract a girl's fancy: the ideal of the aristocrat, tall, slight, with the grace of an Apollo, and the outline and bearing of a king. I, long-descended, even as himself, had all the outward man of a stalwart yeoman, or at best, a country squire, middle-sized, strongly built, whiskerless, with blue eyes, light curly hair, and a colour like a girl's, with big hands, good for nothing but rowing or cricket, and big feet, apt to walk forty miles on end, or jump the breadth of twenty feet, but clumsy in a lady's drawing-room.

What should I do, I thought suddenly, looking round after the pair, who were now far away in the distance. Should I throw her over at once, and with contumely, heaping open contempt upon her for her perfidy? Yes; and cut her to the heart.

"Nay," reasoned common sense, all powerful sovereign, "how could *I* do that if Daylesford had her heart safe in his keeping? I should but betray my own sore and jealous rage. There was another course by which I might hope to hurt her: I could wound her vanity. Vain she must be, for she had encouraged me; and to what end?" The second thought was the best, I decided. I would present myself at the Rectory. I would be as easy and as debonnaire as possible. I would join them afterwards at the ball, and dance with her as I had intended doing: and I would call the next day to take leave of them with the most telling sang-froid. "Diamond cut diamond": she should think she had met her match for once. Me easy and debonnaire, good lack! Me endued with sang-froid, or the hardness of the diamond!

No sooner resolved, than put in the way to execution. I bent my steps towards the Rectory. When I arrived, I found there Miss Thane making tea at the round table in the centre of the large old-fashioned drawing-room, and Miss Neville, looking heated and worried, but seated where I had left her three hours before; in the bow window, looking into the garden, the same book open on her lap. As I entered, Mrs. Neville came down the wide staircase; the good lady was flushed by a siesta; her cap and her hair were a good deal tumbled and awry.

"Well, my sweet child, and are you rested?" she enquired, pausing at the door. "Have you been asleep, my darling? I have not closed an eye. I hope you have fared better?"

Mary looked up at her ponderously caressing parent, a hot flush

rising, despite herself, to her very hair, as she murmured something which Mrs. Neville accepted as an affirmative.

"That's well, my own. Let me go and call your dear papa, Charlotte!"

Charlotte thanked her; and the dowager departed towards the study. Her back turned, I spoke, on the impulse of the moment, utterly infuriated by Mary's double dealing.

"I hope you enjoyed your walk this afternoon, Miss Neville," I said, speaking in low, hurried, bitterly savage tones, which I flattered myself were the accents of cold composure. "Not a *very* good preparation for dancing to-night, *I* should have imagined."

She looked uncertain whether to burst out crying or laughing. She tossed her head haughtily, but dew-drops glistened in her eyes.

"What, you are jealous, my friend; 'in all the moods and tenses of that amiable passion' are you?" she quoted mockingly.

The blood rushed to my face. Her manner was irreconcilable with innocence.

"Tell me what Mr. Daylesford is to you; I have a right to the knowledge," I said, half imperious, half entreating.

"My nearest and dearest," she said, darting a defiant glance at me.

"Thank you for the frankness of the avowal. It would have been better made earlier," I said, striving to conceal my emotion, but breaking utterly down. "Miss Thane, you will perhaps excuse me this evening?" I said abruptly, turning to Charlotte.

She had not heard more than a word or two of our conversation, for her back had been towards us, and the room was large. Now she turned and looked at us both, with anxiety and wonder on her kind countenance.

"Mary, what is it?" she asked. "Harry, stay!"

I was already at the door, but Mary had anticipated her call. Rushing forward, she had seized me by the arm. The clasp of her little firm hands darted painful transport through my veins.

"Don't be a goose, you silly boy," she cried, with the manner of an adult admonishing a very little and very froward child. "I will tell you nothing except at my own time and my own pleasure, and that may be to-night at the ball."

"I am not going," I interrupted sullenly.

"Not if I ask you to dance the first waltz with me?" she said, still holding my arm, and looking up in my face, her colour raised, her eyes speaking soft and eager entreaty.

Just so she had looked up in Daylesford's face, but the similitude did not strike me. I yielded like a lamb, as Mr. Thane and Mrs. Neville came in to tea.

IV.

ELUCIDATION.

I had seen Mary in many moods before that evening, for hers was a most versatile nature: but never had I seen her half so gracious, half so bewitching. It had been her wont to make me pay for any momentary touch of tenderness by flouting and tormenting me. Now she was altogether soft and gentle, and the experience had the charm of a double fascination. I could not tear myself away till Mrs. Neville told Mary for the third time it was necessary she should instantly go and dress. Then I sprang up, making a violent effort.

"You will not be in time for the first waltz," I told her.

"I shall," she said. "Mind that *you* are."

I went; thinking that no power on earth could have detained me from the ball-room a moment beyond the hour fixed on the tickets as that of admission. I was bewitched enough to have hopes that the mystery of Mary's conduct might be explicable. But the fates were against me. I found Boniface in my rooms, when I got back to St. Ambrose's. He still lived on my staircase, and we had kept up a degree of acquaintance founded on a similitude of interests and ambitions, as regarded our University careers. He had been working awfully hard, and had no stamina to support such exertions. He looked fearfully done up. Just as I was telling him it was a precious good job for him Long Vac. had begun, he justified the sentiment by falling off his chair on to the rug, in a dead faint.

I snatched the sofa pillows and bolstered up his head: then I dashed into my room for a great can of water I kept filled to supply my bath, and deluged him with its contents, roaring out lustily, meanwhile, for assistance. It came at last, in the person of a scout, apparently very much out of breath with haste, and considerably flushed as to the face.

"He's uncommon wet," was the worthy's first sapient remark, as he surveyed the prostrate form.

"He is," I said, rather ruefully. You might have ladled the water off him; it was making a little lake on the floor.

"He'll get cold," I said. "Let's carry him to his room, and then you go for a doctor, while I put him into bed."

No sooner said than done. The doctor came in due or rather undue time; he pronounced the patient in want of rest, and opined that bed was the best place for him. It was half-past ten before the doctor went. I was getting desperate; so I promised the scout a sovereign to stay with the invalid till three the next morning, and flinging on my dress clothes, rushed to the Town-hall.

Lancers were being danced all over the room, which was thronged. I looked round eagerly, but saw no Mary. Mrs. Neville, I descried,

seated amid the chaperons on a bench close by the door, at the bottom of the room. As I was moving to ask her where her daughter was, a knot of people to the right separated, and I saw her whom I sought leaning on Daylesford's arm. She was speaking: they were so close I could hear what they said.

"Eleven! and your friend not here! It was a shabby trick to do you out of your dance, Mary."

"Oh! never mind, he'll come! And he will ask me for another, never fear," she said, laughing gaily. "And I have had that one with you. You know mamma will never let me dance with you, Hugh, she says it looks as if I could not get other partners, and you always did suit me better than anyone else in the world."

"What, better than Mr. Carrington?" asked Daylesford, bending down and looking maliciously in her face; yet speaking a little jealously.

"Better than anyone, I have said," she answered flushing scarlet.

In truth, even my jealous heart confessed that they did look well matched. Youthful, handsome, happy: he by far the most disguished looking man in the large and crowded room; she, lustrous in pink, the colour of all others for fair and radiant blondes. As the thought passed through my mind, she turned round suddenly, moved perhaps by some presentiment of my presence. I advanced instantly towards them; rage in my heart, a forced smile upon my face.

"I should have to apologise," I said, bowing stiffly, "but that I have no doubt my absence has provided Miss Neville with a far better and more suitable partner than myself."

"What, you have been listening!" said Mary with a malicious laugh, and a provoking curtsey. "If you had come a little earlier, you would have heard something that would have interested you still more deeply."

"I regret to have lost it," I said, stiff to pokerishness.

"Mary! Mary! you are too bad," said Daylesford, dropping her arm and retreating. "You know where to find me when you have settled your difference with Mr. Carrington."

"Dear me! Hugh is out of sight already!" she said, looking round with feigned annoyance. "How very tiresome! Never mind, I shall have plenty of opportunities to introduce him to you."

"I have no desire to know the gentleman," I said.

"What, not want to know my brother?" said Mary. "How very uncomplimentary to me! I thought you liked me better than that, Mr. Carrington."

"Your brother?" I gasped.

"My half-brother: better to me than troops of whole-brothers are to most girls. I could not tell you about him before, for mamma did not know he was here, and if my little plot had failed, she might have been set against you, if she had found out that you were a conspirator;

and she is not easily appeased. But I forgot—you do not understand it all. Of course not! Let us go and sit down on one of those sofas in the passages outside, and I will tell you about it."

A waltz was beginning, we found a lonely situation, and she commenced her story.

"Mamma's first husband was a Mr. Daylesford. Hugh was their only child; he is rich. Four years after Mr. Daylesford died, mamma married my father—Mr. Neville. Hugh was five years old then; he lived with us till his majority: but there were often rows. Papa and mamma were middle-aged people when I was born, and they were strict, and not used to children. Papa, too, is excessively religious. Hugh was always *my* delight: my playmate, my guardian, my defender, my comforter. I loved him more than I ever loved anybody ——"

"But not more than you love someone?" I whispered, putting my arm round her waist.

"Let me finish my story, sir," she said, disengaging herself, with scarlet cheeks. "Well, we grew up, and Hugh came to college, rather late. He had hoped to get into the army, but mamma set her face so determinedly against it, and papa thinks fighting wicked. It would make her wretched, mamma said; and Hugh is too kind to be happy while anyone he loves is unhappy. He had almost finished his course here, when there were all those rows in St. Ambrose's, and he was expelled. He had always been fast; not really wicked, but wild; and that seemed the height of viciousness to papa. His expulsion made him furious, and mamma excessively angry. They refused to see him, and even returned a letter unopened that he wrote to mamma. He is haughty, and tried no more, but I did not give up hopes, and watched for an opportunity of reconciling them. Mamma is the governing spirit at home, Mr. Carrington: I knew if she could ever be brought to forgive Hugh, papa would follow her lead at last, after much grumbling. If she were to see him, unprepared, I thought her heart might melt. So I wrote to him directly she came here, telling him that I was in Oxford, but not saying that she was. I met him by appointment this afternoon, when she was safe asleep; and made him promise to be here waiting for us this evening. He met us at the entrance to the room, and mamma gave in with ignominious quickness at the sight of him. They have had a talk, and she has promised to use her influence with papa, if Hugh will take his degree as a sign of penitence. He is going to Magdalen Hall next term."

"I wonder why you concealed so carefully from me that you had had a brother at St. Ambrose's?" I said, as she paused.

"Because Charlotte Thane told me before I saw you how good and proper you were, sir," she replied; "and I thought that you would be set against Hugh if you knew he had been expelled. I wanted you so much to meet him without prejudice, and like him."

Then I told her, to her intense delight, how powerfully Daylesford

had taken my fancy when I had first seen him; and that I had helped in the very raid which had terminated in his expulsion.

"I am glad!" she said. "I shall not be frightened of you now I know you are like other people."

"Were you ever afraid of me?" I asked, astonished.

"Dreadfully," she confessed; but her eyes half contradicted her words.

"You will never be afraid of me again," I whispered.

"No," she promised. And then I began to take myself most bitterly to task for my brutal suspicions. "If Charlotte Thane had only happened ever to tell me that she had known Daylesford, I should have been less idiotic! But, you see, it seemed to me that his existence had been purposely hid from me —"

"Charlotte had never heard there was such a person till six weeks ago," interrupted Mary. "It is papa who is a connection of the Thanes, and you know they had lost sight of each other for years and years. I could hardly help giving you a hint of the nature of the mystery this afternoon, but you made me too angry. You ought to have felt you could trust me ——"

"I should have if I had loved you less," was my logical defence. "I cannot imagine such a love as mine free from jealousy. Your cool, indifferent suitors may be judicious and impartial, but I am of a different stamp, my sweetest."

"I hope you are going to be a barrister?" queried Mary tormentingly. "You have skill enough to make the worse appear the better cause, most certainly."

I was about to take my revenge, when the portly form of my mother-in-law elect loomed, large and imposing, in a doorway close at hand.

"My dearest child," she began. "Do you know you have sat out two whole dances? And your deserted partners have been teasing me out of my very life."

We rose, murmuring apologetically, and considerably roseate as to our cheeks.

"You must give me all the round dances while I am here," I whispered. "I have to be back by three. And that reminds me I have never told you why I was late to-night ——"

"You need not," she interrupted with a saucy smile. "I know well enough you would have been here in time if you could have managed it."

I took a first-class in due course, and married Mary directly afterwards. I got not only the wife I coveted but the friend I desired, and a brother to boot. Daylesford and myself became inseparables. One of the first questions I asked him was, where he got the Warden's toggery from to decorate our man of snow. "I tipped that old humbug of a porter considerably," was the simple explanation of the mystery.

ANTOINE, THE BLACKSMITH.

By F. E. M. Notley, Author of "Olive Varcoe."

WE have grand names in the Ardennes; old Roman names, modified into patois, toned down, as it were, to a sober tint, suited to the grimy trades to which Cæsar, Augustus, Antony, and Galba have betaken themselves.

Antoine, the blacksmith, was a sturdy fellow, and in spite of a stoop in the shoulders, he was handsome too, and well-made. Yet there was a shiftiness in his eye that made that stoop, at times, look wicked. He had a hazel eye—light hazel, the fickle colour—the most fickle eye that shines; the eye ever changing, ever seeking something new, every wearying of what it hath, ever greedy of enjoyment in the present, ever ungrateful for the past, unmindful of the future. Ah! and when such an eye hath soft brown lashes round it, 'tis the most dangerous eye to a woman's peace that ever lighted up the head of fickle man.

Poor Eulalie! She was the prettiest girl in all the commune, but not hardy and brown like the Ardennaises. No touch of coarseness in her; too frail and delicate for the rough climate and the rough people, she looked like some pale exotic plant brought harshly from a greenhouse to die in the cold wind.

I was very sorry when I saw her dancing with Antoine at the village fête; sorrier still when I met her next day coming home from vespers, walking shily by his side.

"Now, hang the man!" I said, within myself. "Are there not hardy maidens enough in the village—maidens who would bear his fickleness as calmly as they will next winter's frost; why, then, should he fix on this frail flower? If he breathes over it one frosty breath, it will die."

"Good evening, Eulalie," I said, aloud. "It is rather late for you to be out: the wind is fresh, the dew is falling fast. You should go in, my child. You know the Doctor said you should avoid night air."

"I have my shawl, sir, thank you," she said, sweetly.

"I can take care of Ma'amselle Eulalie," said Antoine, with a curious fire in his light eyes. "Monsieur's solicitude is ill-placed. Bon soir, monsieur. We go to take a turn by the river."

I looked after them and sighed. Then I turned resolutely away.

"A plague take my dreaming fancies!" thought I. "Why must I always be meddling? And a thousand of my poor warnings would be of no avail. Will a pebble on the sea-shore stop the tide?"

I had a house near that pretty hamlet—a sort of summer nest—

whither I resorted in the fishing months, when the river near was brimful of trout and grayling, and teeming with other fish less dainty. And so it happened every day, as I shouldered my basket and rod, and went forth solitary to my sport, I saw Antoine, the blacksmith, busier at his wooing than at his work. In the morning I met him coming to his forge, and I knew he had had speech with Eulalie in her little garden, for the saucy man bore a flower in his hand, or pinned daintily in his wide-awake, and his light hazel eyes smiled mockingly as he bade me good-morrow. Then, in the evening, when I came home weary, well-laden with fish, I saw his forge fire dead, and his tools flung down with a hasty hand.

"He is away in the summer woods with Eulalie," I said, and my basket and rod grew strangely heavy.

When I met Eulalie she was all smiles and brightness—a rosier hue on her delicate face, a softer light in her loving blue eyes, and in her elastic step a newer grace. Looking at her happiness, I grew to have softer thoughts of Antoine.

"I have mistaken his character," I said; "or else this poor girl's singular beauty is able to chain even a fickle fancy."

Then I schooled and chided myself right well for my own sore thoughts.

"Come now, silly one," I said, "own to thyself that this rare beauty of hers—so delicate, so patrician—stirred within thy solitary fancy some strange dreamings. 'Not a girl made for a peasant to love,' ran thy musings, 'but intended by nature for a lady. Nay, more, a princess of the woods; too delicate, too refined, to give her heart to one of these clowns. If, now, a man—a gentleman—knowing his own mind, could have the courage to fling aside worldly trammels——"

Ah me! how the threads of a thin purpose snap even at a slight touch.

Antoine, the blacksmith, danced next night with Eulalie at the village fête, walked home with her from vespers, and, in the morning, I went fishing!

"All things are for the best," I said. "She is a peasant girl—the princess was in my fancy—and she loves a peasant. How much better and happier for her than the sneers of Brussels, or the cold contempt of an English provincial town."

So I hooked trout and grayling in glens and valleys, where a painter's soul would faint with ecstasy, and Antoine, the blacksmith, went into Love's garden, and picked my fairest rose.

What mattered it? Philosophy and the world's customs deemed us both right. Therefore, it was better for me to fish and take my pastime, and leave Antoine, the blacksmith, to his work, and his wooing. This last was sport to him—crueller sport than mine; for, like a wicked fowler, he snared my little bird and slew it.

When I went back to Brussels in the autumn, I left the pair be-

trothed. I was in haste to go; I resisted the great Baron's entreaty to stay a week with him, to hunt the wild boar, and shoot foxes and wild cats in the forest; and I rejected the more noble offer of an adventurous Cantab, who had brought a paper boat upon his shoulders, and proposed to row me and himself down the rivers Lesse and Meuse, and on to the world's end if I would.

In hard work at Brussels, the winter went by coldly, the spring more coldly still; then came fiery summer, and I thought gladly of rushing back to my nest in the Ardennes.

"They were to be married at the new year," I said. "She is quite a matron now. Ah, well! I hope Antoine, the blacksmith, will make her a good husband—good and true, for he has the fairest flower of the Ardennes."

I asked no questions of my housekeeper on the night of my arrival in my summer home, and in the morning the good dame was busy, so I strolled down to the village and called at the good Curé's.

"Yes, he is at home," said the priest's sister; "but he is engaged."

"Then I will wait awhile," I answered, and I stepped into the little parlour.

When the door was closed, and I was left alone, the hum of voices reached me, and looking into the garden, I saw the Curé seated on a rustic bench near the window. A muffled figure stood by him; but she leant against the wall, and I could not see her face.

"No, my father; let him who caused my pain partake of it. It seems that I must die. Well, let him see me die. Let him know what he has done."

The book I had taken up fell from my hand. This was Eulalie's voice, changed and broken, but not less sweet and musical.

"My child," said the priest, "you are wrong; these feelings are sinful; they savour of revenge."

"No, father; not revenge. Heaven has avenged me. The girl for whom he left me is dead—cut down in the midst of her triumph and joy—dead, after only one day's illness. How, then, can I have thoughts of vengeance in my heart? And although I too, die, the good God has been merciful to me. I die slowly, inch by inch, and not in joy, as she did. No; joy and I parted long ago."

"But, my daughter, surely for one so near the end, thy thoughts are too much engrossed by this world. Come to me in confessional, and hear of heavenly things; and put the thoughts of this marriage behind thee, as a temptation of the enemy."

"O father, you mistake me!" cried Eulalie, and there was a slight ring of indignation in her voice. "I do no wicked thing in marrying Antoine. I love him. He is come back to me in sorrow and remorse, and no one will believe that I have forgiven him, if I do not

become his wife. If he is my husband, he can nurse and tend me; he can come to my bedside, and receive my last prayer, my last word; but if I refuse him, I must die away from his presence, and my mother will hate him."

"Say no more, poor child; I will marry thee, if thou wilt."

"Thanks, father. All the formalities the law demands are done; we will come to church to-morrow."

She went down the garden with a feeble step, and as she turned to shut the wicket gate, I saw her face.

Was this the Flower of St. Etienne? Poor flower! how changed and sad, how pale and broken, since I saw her, but a year ago, radiant in the joy of her first love.

"What has happened?" I asked the Curé, as he shook me by the hand. "Eulalie is sadly altered. She has a dying look upon her face that grieves me."

"Her face tells but the sorrowful truth, my friend. She goes with the first breath of autumn; she is in a deep decline."

"And how is this, that she is not married to the blacksmith? I overheard your talk; you marry her to-morrow."

"Yes; and I am sorry for it. The man looks upon this marriage as an expiation of his sin, and I would not grant him this poor salve to his conscience could I help it."

"But they were to have been married at the new year," I cried. "I cannot understand this delay."

"At the new year, Antoine was talking of marriage to another maiden. Sit down, and I will tell you the tale.

"All went well with Antoine and Eulalie till the Feast of St. Barbe, last November. At the little village of St. Barbe, across the hill, there was a dance on their fête day. Antoine went to it. Eulalie did not go. The weather was rough, and he persuaded her to remain at home. Of late, I think, he had wearied a little of her love, and her calm temper, which never tried him with caprice and coquetry.

"There was a procession and much extra service at the church of St. Barbe on the fête day, and I went thither to assist the Curé. So it happened that I passed down among the dancers in the afternoon, and observed Antoine dancing vigorously with a handsome girl named Thérèse Dufresne."

"I have ever thought him a fickle man," I said, interrupting the Curé's story with a useless sigh.

"Fickle and heartless. The dance was but the beginning of his coquetry with Thérèse. A few Sundays more he still appeared by Eulalie's side in coming home from mass; a few evenings more he waited for her, as she came from vespers; then he went over shamefully to his idol, and all the village knew she was deserted. She had no pride to bear her up. She sank from that day, making no effort to hide her grief.

"But, engrossed in his new passion, Antoine saw nothing. He

was at St. Barbe every day. He spent all his Sundays and holidays there. From her window Eulalie often watched him, as he walked whistling and careless over the hill, swinging in his hand the flowers he was taking to Thérèse.

"Thérèse was a handsome girl. A thorough Ardennaise, with dark hair and eyes, and ruddy brown complexion, tall and strong, with an arm almost as well able to wield a hammer as Antoine's own. Moreover, she was wilful in her temper and capricious, and this suited a man like him.

"As he went to St. Barbe, he never knew whether his greeting would be kind or cruel. If she had parted with him with a kiss on one day, she might meet him with a frown and a hard word the next. And so, in spite of their many quarrels, she kept the fickle man faithful, far more enthralled by her coarse beauty and hard caprices, than ever he had been by the perfect love and loveliness of Eulalie.

"At length he told in triumph that he had won her consent to wed him; and he wore at his forge a more joyous face, whistling and singing as he handled his work, and sent forth the sparks from his fire merrily into the little street.

"Eulalie would not believe the news. She could not, would not, deem him so cruel and heartless. Up to this time she had, perhaps, nursed some foolish hopes; some thought that he would leave his fickle fancy and come back to her. And when her mother told her the tale of his approaching marriage, she shook her head, and said she would only believe it from his own lips.

"She went down to the forge, where the hammer sounded merrily on the anvil, and the sparks flew, and the laughter and jest of rude health helped the work, and added to its noisy music. There, unnoticed, she leaned a moment against the door-sill, watching the brawny arms and handsome face of her false lover, as, in the pride of his strength, he wielded and moulded the glowing iron on his anvil. He, careless in the enjoyment of his coarse health, and happy in his fickle love, and she pale, broken-hearted, and dying—dying for him. There she stood at his door, unregarded—she who had wasted health, and life, and love on him—while he trolled a rollicking ditty with amorous lips, and the glow of the fire warm on his ruddy cheek. But suddenly he turned his light hazel eyes on her—the sheen of the flames in them—and a touch of shame came over him.

"'Ma'amselle Eulalie,' he said, 'can I do anything for you?'

"'I am come,' gasped the girl, 'not in anger, Antoine, but only to hear the truth from your own lips. Is it true that you marry Thérèse Dufresne next week?'

"Her face turned ashy pale as she spoke, and she grasped the door-sill with feeble hands to support herself.

"Antoine was embarrassed and silent.

"'You see, Mademoiselle Eulalie,' he said, shrugging his shoulders,

and holding out his blackened hands in a deprecating way, 'you were scarcely the girl to suit a man like me. You are so frail and delicate—almost like a lady.'

"'Antoine, I was well and happy till I knew you.'

"And, wringing her hands together, the dying girl looked in his face for pity. But there was none. There was only a rough kind of shame in the man, and a feeling of irritation that she should dare to come there, and reproach him with her pale face.

"'You had better go home, Mademoiselle; the villagers will wag their tongues at you if they see you speaking to me *now*.'

"'The truth! the truth! Tell me the truth, Antoine; that is all I ask.'

"'Well, then, since you will have it—yes; I marry Mademoiselle Thérèse next week.'

"And, as he spoke his bride's name, there shone in his pale eyes that amorous light and gleam of triumphant passion, that in days gone by had fallen upon *her* face in warm rays, when he stooped to kiss her, or when beneath the summer shade of trees, they had walked hand in hand, talking of their love.

"Down upon the anvil came the stalwart blow of his great hammer, and, adding discourtesy to his cruel words, he turned his back on her, whistling at his work. It needed but this to break her heart. She left the door faint and sick with woe, uttering no word of anger, breathing no rash prayer to heaven to avenge her cause.

"And yet the vengeance came. The month of May broke in upon us fiercely hot. Snow melted hurriedly on the hills, flooding valley and meadow as with a sea, and as this dried in the sun, leaving many a sluggish pool, fever fell upon the villages that lay nestled in the deep glens.

"You know, St. Barbe lies low between great cliffs. Well, the fever fell there first, and in three days ten men and women, hale and hearty, dropped before it, as the corn falls before the sickle.

"In the evening Thérèse Dufresne walked with her lover, counting the hours to their wedding; in the morning she lay on her bed stricken, raving, dying. Her father sent for Antoine, but she did not know him. With frenzied hands, she pushed him from her, and died raving of some old lover gone for a soldier, and lying blind in the hospital at Ghent.

"And now the blacksmith was a marked man. People cried 'A judgment!' and his forge grew silent and deserted. Meanwhile, Eulalie perished day by day, like a flower withering in the wind. And whether it was remorse, or time-serving fear, or a return of love, I know not, but in a few short weeks after Thérèse's death, Antoine wooed her again to be his wife, and she consented."

Thus the Curé's tale ended: and I, looking sorrowfully in his face, sat silent, then walked homewards musing on many things.

They were married, but I went not to the wedding; and for many days I shouldered my basket early, and wandered to the deepest and farthest glens, sometimes throwing my line idly in the stream, but oftener sitting on the bank watching the riplets flow and the rushes wave.

So a month went by; and every evening when I returned and laid down my empty basket, with the smile that hid a sigh, I heard that she was worse.

"She is dying fast, now," said my housekeeper. "Poor thing! she is worn to a very shadow. I saw her yesterday in the cemetery leaning on her husband's arm, choosing her grave. There were tears on his cheek. Ah! he has *his* share now of grief, as it is fitting he should have. And I hear they are very poor. People go miles away to another forge, rather than go to him."

"Poor!" I said. And there rose up in my throat so strange a sob, that for a moment no other word would come. Then, hiding my face in shadow, I bade her take hastily all needful things to her.

"No, stay—not to her. Take them to her mother, and let her take them to her daughter."

Then, sitting lonely by my wood fire, I thought bitterly of the empty shadows of this world, and how strange it was that I should send bread in charity to one whom, in foolish dreams, I had clothed in satin and jewels, and honoured as a queen.

A few days further on, when I heard she would leave her bed no more, there came upon me a silly longing to see her face. After many thoughts and fightings with my wish, I spoke to her mother of this.

"I had ever been her friend," I said. "Might I see her and say farewell?"

The mother looked at me with frightened eyes. "She could not tell," she answered. "Antoine had grown so fierce, she dared not ask him. Somehow, since he knew he must lose his wife, and she slipped from his grasp into Death's, he loved her with a stronger, fiercer love than ever in his passionate days he had given to Thérèse; and he begrudged every word and look given to another. He was jealous even of her."

And the woman went her way, weeping as she went.

Now I was bitter indeed. So this coarse man, who had killed my pretty flower, was her master in death as in life; and he denied me even the poor consolation of one last word. What a strange triumph was his over the loving heart he had broken!

The next day, with my rod as a pretence, I climbed a great hill-top, and sat among the solitudes of the mountain, till faith in God's goodness, growing from the peace and stillness and beauty of the earth, wrung that drop of bitterness from out my heart.

Wending my way homewards among the evening shadows, I met the Curé.

"Come with me," he said. "Eulalie has asked for you."

And now I hesitated. "I fear," I said, "to go. Perhaps my indignation for that man will not hold itself calmly quiet, even in her presence."

"You will not see him," said the Curé.

In another moment I was kneeling by her couch. And if before I saw her face I had longed to say—"Could you have loved a man who would have made you a lady, and sheltered you from the rough wind and the cold hand of poverty and ill?" I longed no more to utter such wild and selfish words, when her dying eyes looked gratefully into mine, and she thanked me humbly for the kindness I had done her.

Ah! then I sank down into the depths of humiliation. Kindness? She, an angel, just going to heaven, thanking me, a poor worm on earth, for kindness!

What was it? A little food—a little wine. Great heavens! what poor creatures we are, when we exact gratitude for such puny gifts as these! Gifts given to angels—for such, many times and oft, are the poor and dying, though we know it not.

Then she put out her hand to me; but I, looking at her through a mist of tears, did not see it till her slender fingers touched mine, and drew me down towards her.

"Forgive Antoine," she whispered, and a deep blush came over her face. "I loved him always. I never loved but him."

Then I saw that that dream of mine, hidden in my heart, had reached her, I know not how, and thrown a shade of fear and sorrow in her soul for me.

"God bless you, Eulalie," I said, "I forgive him. There is not a shadow of anger in my heart against him now."

The next day she died. And in the evening, as I was going down to the Curé's, feeling it not good for me to be alone, I saw a lonely man in the cemetery digging a grave. I drew near to him.

It was Antoine, the blacksmith. He was digging the grave for Eulalie, his wife. His face was ghastly white, and haggard with many tears, and as his stalwart and strong arms raised the earth and cast it aside, sobs rent his bosom, till, trembling in his anguish, he rested on his spade, and bowed his head upon his clasped hands.

Then I stole away, and told the Curé what I had seen.

"Yes," he answered, "Antoine had chosen this dreadful task as a penance. He would dig the grave himself, he said, for the heart he had broken."

M. ELLEN EDWARDS. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"AT THAT MOMENT HE FELT THAT HE LOVED HER VERY DEARLY."

THE ARGOSY.

APRIL, 1880.

THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

CHAPTER X.

A DAY WITH PHILIP CLEEVE.

WHEN Philip Cleeve opened his eyes the morning after his visit to The Lilacs it took him a minute or two to collect his thoughts, and call to mind all that had happened during the previous evening. In the cold unsympathetic light of early morn his overheated fancies of the preceding night seemed to have little more substance in them than a dream. He could not quite forget Margaret Ducie's liquid black eyes, or the fascination of her smile; but the glamour was gone, and he thought of them as of something that could never trouble his peace of mind again. "It was that champagne," thought Philip.

There was, however, one very tangible fact connected with the doings of the preceding night which would not allow itself to be forgotten. He had gambled away Mr. Tiplady's twenty pounds, and it would have to be his disagreeable duty this morning to ask his mother to make good the loss. Mentally and bodily he felt out of sorts, and out of humour with himself and the world. Very little breakfast did he eat. Lady Cleeve only came down when it was getting time for him to set out for the office. She asked a little about his visit of the previous evening, and also after Freddy Bootle, who was rather a favourite of hers.

"Bootle has promised to dine here to-morrow," said Philip. "This evening I dine with him at the Rose and Crown." He left his seat and went to the window. The disagreeable moment could be put off no longer. Going behind Lady Cleeve's chair, he leaned over and kissed her. "Mother, I am going to ask you to do a most preposterous thing," he said.

"Not many times in your life, dear, have you done that," she answered. "But what is it?"

"I want you to give me twenty-five pounds."

"Twenty-five pounds is a large sum, Philip—that is, a large sum for me. But I suppose you would not ask me for it unless you really need it."

"Certainly not, mother. I need it for a very special purpose indeed."

"Can you tell me for what?"

"No," said Philip, in a low tone. "It—it is for someone," he rather lamely added.

"You are going to lend it! Well, Philip, if it is for some worthy friend who is in want, I will say nothing," said Lady Cleeve, who had implicit confidence in her son. "You shall have the money."

Philip's face was burning. He turned to the window again.

"Do you know that next Tuesday will be your birthday, Philip?" asked his mother. "You will be twenty-two. How the years fly as we grow old! Your asking for this money brings to my mind something which I did not intend to mention to you till your birthday was actually here; but, there is no reason why I should not tell you now. Can you guess, my dear boy, what amount I have saved up, and safely put away for you in Nullington Bank? But how should it be possible for you to guess?"—Philip had turned by this time, and was staring at his mother.

"I have saved up twelve hundred pounds," continued Lady Cleeve. "Yes, Philip, twelve hundred pounds; and on the day you are twenty-two the amount in full will be transferred into your name, and will become your sole property."

"Mother!" was all that the young man could say in that first moment of surprise. Then he took her hand and kissed it.

She smiled, and stroked his curls fondly. "I need hardly tell you, Philip, that the hope I have had, all along, was that my savings might ultimately be of use in advancing your interests in whatever profession you might finally choose. You have now been two years with Mr. Tiplady, and I gather that you are quite satisfied to remain with him. I have had a little quiet chat with Mr. Tiplady: you know that he and I are very old friends. I named to him the amount I had lying by me in the Bank, and hinted to him that he might do worse than take you into partnership. His reply was that he had never hitherto thought about a partner, but that the idea was worth consideration, more especially as he had some thought of retiring from business in the course of a few years. There the matter was left, and I have had no talk with him since, but I think the opening would be a most excellent one for you."

"Twelve hundred pounds seems a lot of money to hand over to old Tiplady," said Philip, with rather a long face.

"Why 'old' Tiplady, dear? He is younger than I am," said

Lady Cleeve, with a faint smile. "His business is excellent and superior, as you know; one in which, if you join him, you may rise to eminence. Mr. Tiplady seemed to doubt whether twelve hundred pounds was a sufficient sum to induce him to take you into partnership. And of course it seems ridiculously small, compared with the advantages. But I suppose he thinks your connections would go for something—and he is too well off for money to be an object with him. At first you would take but a small share."

Philip shrugged his shoulders and whistled under his breath. "We can talk of that another time," he said. "How can I thank you enough, mother mine, for this wonderful gift? You are a veritable fairy queen."

In truth, he could not think where so much money had come from. Twelve hundred pounds! He knew the extent of his mother's income and what proportion of it, of late years, had found its way into his own pocket; but he did not know that his mother, in view of some such contingency as the present one, had begun to save and pinch and put away a few pounds now and again even before her husband's death—many years before. The magic of compound interest had done the rest.

Philip Cleeve carried a light heart with him that morning as he set out for the office, and the twenty-five pounds given him by his mother. He had not only got out of his present difficulty easily and without trouble, but in a few short days he would be a capitalist on his own account; he would be one of those favoured mortals, a man with a balance at his banker's and a cheque-book of his own in his pocket. He could hardly believe in the reality of his good fortune. As for handing over in toto to Mr. Tiplady the sum that was coming thus unexpectedly into his possession—it was a matter that required consideration, very grave consideration indeed. But he would have plenty of time to think about that afterwards.

As he crossed the market-place he stopped to look in the window of Thompson the jeweller. There was a gold hunting-watch lying in it that he had often admired. In a few days, should he be so minded, he might make it his own. And that pretty signet ring. The price of it was only five guineas—a mere bagatelle to a man with twelve hundred pounds. Hitherto he had never worn a ring, but other young men wore such things, and there was no reason now why he should not do the same. A minute or two later he passed his tailor. "Good morning, Dobson," he said with a smile. "I shall look you up in a day or two."

Having to pass the Rose and Crown Hotel on his way to the office, he thought he might as well look up Freddy Bootle. But that gentleman was not yet downstairs, so Philip set out again. As he passed Welland's, the florist, he saw two magnificent bouquets in the window. All at once it struck him that it would not be amiss to pay a morning call at The Lilacs and present Mrs. Ducie with one

of the bouquets. Without pausing to reflect, he entered the shop. He was waited on by pretty Mary Welland, the florist's lame daughter, by whose deft fingers the flowers had been arranged. After a little smiling chat, he and Mary being old acquaintances, he chose one of the bouquets and had it wrapped up in tissue paper. The price was half a guinea, but to Philip, in the mood in which he then was, half a guinea seemed a matter of little moment.

Philip had started on his way again, when he encountered Maria Kettle. They both started as their eyes met, and a guilty flush mounted to Philip's brow. Maria at once held out her hand, and her glance fell on the bouquet in its envelope of tissue paper. All in a moment it flashed into Philip's mind that to-day was Maria's birthday. There was little more than the difference of a week between their ages.

"Good morning, Philip," began Maria. "Papa and I have been wondering what had become of you. You have only been to see us once since we got back."

"The fact is," said Philip in a hesitating way, very unusual with him, "I have been much engaged—Bootle is here, now, too, and he has taken up a good deal of my time. But I have not forgotten that this is your birthday, Maria, and ——" here he paused and looked at the bouquet. "In fact, I was on my way to ——" then he hesitated again and held out the bouquet.

"You were on the way to the vicarage," said Maria, with a smile, "and these pretty flowers are for me. I know they are pretty before I look at them. It was kind of you to remember my birthday."

Philip felt immensely relieved. "Accept them with my love, Maria," he whispered, and at that moment he felt that he loved her very dearly. Then he pressed one of her hands in his and spoke the good wishes customary on such occasions. A bright, glad look came into Maria's eyes, and her pale cheek flushed at Philip's words. He turned and walked a little way with her, and then they parted.

Philip sighed as he turned away. What an air of quiet goodness there was about Maria! How sweet and saintly she looked in her dress of homely blue with the sunlight shining on her! "If she had lived five hundred years ago, her face would have been painted as that of some mediæval saint," muttered Philip to himself. "She is far away too good to be the wife of such a shuffling weak-minded fellow as I am."

When he reached the florist's shop on his way back to the office, the remaining bouquet was still in the window. He hesitated a moment and then went in. "I will take that other bouquet if you please, Miss Welland," he said: but Mary noticed that there was no smile on his face this time, as she tied up the flowers. Philip set off in the direction of The Lilacs. He was dissatisfied with himself for what he had done, there was a sore feeling at work within him,

and yet his steps seemed drawn irresistibly towards the roof that sheltered Margaret Ducie.

He had got about half way to the cottage when he was overtaken by Captain Lennox in his dog-cart. "'Morning, Cleeve," called out the Captain; "where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"I didn't know that I was in a hurry," said Philip as he faced round, while that wretched tell-tale flush, which he could not succeed in keeping down, mounted to his face. "The fact is, I was on my way to the cottage," he added. "I thought that I might venture to call on Mrs. Ducie and ask her acceptance of a few flowers."

"And she will be very pleased to see you, I do not doubt," answered Lennox. "I am on the way home myself; so jump up and I will give you a lift."

When they reached the cottage they found Mrs. Ducie practising some songs which she had just received from London. She wore a dress of some soft, creamy material embroidered with flowers, with ornamental silver pins in her hair and a silver snake round one of her wrists. She accepted Philip's flowers very graciously. "How charmingly they are arranged," she said; "and what an eye for artistic effect. I must try to paint them before they begin to fade."

Philip begged that he might not interrupt her singing; so she resumed her seat at the piano, and he stationed himself behind her and turned over the leaves of her music. Now that he was here and in her presence, and so near to her that he could have stooped and touched her hair with his lips, the infatuation of last night crept over him again with irresistible force. He was like a man bewitched, from whom all power of volition seems stolen away. She looked to him even more beautiful this morning in the soft cool twilight of the drawing-room than when seen by lamplight yesterday evening. Nowhere had he seen a woman like her, or one who exercised over him so nameless but all-powerful a charm. By-and-by she persuaded him to sing too.

At last Philip remembered that he must go. The office was not pressed for work just now, and Mr. Tiplady had given him a partial holiday during Bootle's stay: but Philip felt that there was reason in all things. Moreover, Tiplady was away himself to-day.

"When the cat's away," laughed Captain Lennox, upon Philip's saying this.

"I can drive you into the town if you like, Mr. Cleeve," said Mrs. Ducie, who had just reappeared, dressed for going out. "My ponies are at the gate."

Philip accepted the offer gladly. "I shall see you later in the day," were Lennox's last words to him as he was driven away.

Mrs. Ducie was an accomplished whip, and had a thorough mastery over her high-spirited ponies. Very few minutes sufficed to bring the party to Nullington. They had slackened their pace a little

while a load of timber drew out of the way, when Maria Kettle stepped out of a chemist's shop just as they were passing the door. She saw Mrs. Ducie and Philip, and at the same moment they recognised her. A look that was partly surprise and partly trouble came into her eyes; but she bowed gravely and passed on. Mrs. Ducie smiled and bowed; Philip, colouring furiously, greeted Maria with an awkward nod, and then turned away his head. How thoroughly ashamed of himself he felt!

"What a charming young lady Miss Kettle is," said Mrs. Ducie a minute later.

Philip gave a keen look at his companion's face, but there was nothing to be read there. "I was not aware that you knew Miss Kettle," he said a little stiffly.

"I have had the pleasure of meeting her three or four times since her return, and Ferdinand and I attend church regularly. I never met anyone who with so much goodness was so entirely unaffected."

It was like heaping coals of fire on Philip's head for him to have to listen to these words. Nothing more was said till the carriage drew up for Philip to alight. Mrs. Ducie held out her hand. "I hope we shall see you at the cottage again soon, Mr. Cleeve," she graciously said. "I assure you that both to my brother and myself your visits will always be a pleasure."

Philip replied suitably, and went his way. He was grievously annoyed at having been seen by Maria Kettle in the act of driving out with Mrs. Ducie; yet he could not forget how charming Margaret was, and how kindly she had received his flowers.

Scarcely had he at length entered the office when Freddy Bootle came in, asking him to take holiday for the rest of the day. The old clerk, Mr. Best, manager in Mr. Tiplady's absence, was agreeable to it. Philip was a favourite of his, and there was not much doing.

Away went Philip and his friend gaily, arm-in-arm. Philip's heels were always light where pleasure was concerned. After eating some luncheon at the Rose and Crown, they adjourned to the billiard-room. Only then did it occur to Philip that the bank-notes his mother had given him in the morning were in his pocket still. He ought to have handed them over to Mr. Best; he had meant to do so; but other matters had put it out of his head.

Lord Camberley and Captain Lennox came in to dinner, in answer to the invitation of Mr. Bootle. Afterwards they all sat talking, over their coffee and cigars. Captain Lennox, the thought striking him, enquired of Bootle whether his lost watch had turned up.

"Not it," said Freddy. "It will never turn up, any more than your purse will. It was an odd thing, come to think of it, that Mrs. Carlyon should have been robbed on the same night. Just as if the same thief had done it all!"

Lord Camberley pricked up his ears. "How was it?" he asked. "What were the robberies?" And Mr. Bootle related them.

"Pretty good cheek—to leave the case under the curtains and walk off with the baubles!" observed his lordship. "I suppose it was too big to carry away?"

"Too big to carry away unobserved, and too big to be stowed away in a coat, I take it," said Captain Lennox. "How large was it, Cleeve?—you saw it, I think. The fellow must have disposed of the articles about his pockets."

"How large?" repeated Philip, who was sitting with his chair tilted and his head thrown back, puffing forth volumes of smoke in silence, "oh—about *that* large"—making a movement with his hand. "Just give me my coffee-cup, will you, Freddy."

Later, the party sat down to cards. They began by playing Napoleon, as on the previous evening; but this was changed for the still more dangerous game of Unlimited Loo. At neither one game nor the other was Philip Cleeve anything like a match for those experienced players, Camberley and Lennox, and he grew nervous and excitable. When the party broke up Philip had not only lost the twenty-five pounds given him in the morning by his mother, but fifteen pounds more, for which Lord Camberley held his I O U. As for Freddy Bootle, he did not much care for cards, and he played with a severe indifference to either the smiles or frowns of fortune: if he lost, it was a matter of little consequence to him; if he won, it was a few sovereigns more in the pocket of a man who had already more money than he knew what to do with.

Philip rose from the table with haggard eyes, flushed face, and trembling hands. "I will redeem my scrap of paper in the morning," he remarked to his lordship.

"All right, old man: you will find me in the billiard-room about four o'clock," answered Camberley. "Only look here, there's no need to be in such a desperate hurry, you know." He had a dim suspicion that Philip was not over well off in money matters.

"I shall be in the billiard-room at four," retorted Philip with some hauteur. He resented the implication in Camberley's words—that perhaps it might not be convenient to pay the fifteen pounds so quickly. His poverty was a matter that concerned no one but himself.

As he walked home alone under the cold light of the stars, and went back in memory to the events of this evening and the last, they seemed to him nothing more than a wretched phantasmagoria, in which only the ghost of his real self had played a part. He was a loser to the extent of forty pounds. And where was he to raise the twenty-five pounds for Tiplady, or the fifteen for Camberley?

There was only one way—by applying to his friend Bootle. It was a disagreeable necessity, but Philip saw no help for it. Bootle was rich and generous, and would lend him the money in a moment. It would only be needed for a few days. The very first cheque he

drew, after coming into that twelve hundred pounds, should be one to repay Freddy.

And, thus easily settling difficulties, Mr. Philip finished up by vowing to himself that he would never touch another card.

CHAPTER XI.

A VISIT FROM MRS. CARLYON.

Dr. Spreckley felt like an angry man. When he read Squire Denison's curt note—curt as to the part of his dismissal—his first impulse was to go up to the Hall and demand an explanation from his old friend and patient. He had been forced into a corner as it were, been driven into telling a certain disagreeable truth, and now he was discarded for having done so, and a young practitioner of less experience and no note, was taken on in his place! It was very unjust. But Dr. Spreckley never did anything in a hurry. He put the Squire's note away, saying, "I'll sleep upon it."

On the morrow he found that Dr. Jago was really in attendance on the Squire. Dr. Spreckley met him on his way thither in a hired one-horse fly, and received a gracious wave of the hand by way of greeting. "I'll not interfere," exploded the old Doctor in the bitterness of his heart; "I'll never darken Denison's doors again. Unless he sends for me," he added a minute later. "And for all the good *he* can do him"—with a contemptuous glance after Jago—"that won't be long first."

Meanwhile, at the Hall, the Squire was soothing and explaining the change to Ella, who regarded it with dismay.

"I don't like Dr. Jago, Uncle Gilbert. And Dr. Spreckley was our friend of many years."

"And why don't you like Dr. Jago, lassie?"

"I don't know. There's something about him that repels me; it lies in his eyes, I think. I never spoke to him but once."

"When you know more of him, you will like him better," returned the Squire. "I am not sure that *I* like him much, personally. But if he cures me—what shall you say then? Come now!"

"I would say then that I should like him for ever," replied Ella, laughing.

"Well, child, he is hoping to do it. And I think he will."

"Is this true, Uncle Gilbert?"

The Squire patted her cheek. "What a disbelieving little girl it is! Jago is a wonderfully clever man, Ella; there's no doubt of that; he has studied in foreign schools, and he is about to try an entirely new kind of treatment upon me. He thinks it will turn up trumps, and so do I?"

Ella drew a long, relieved breath. "Oh I am so glad, dear uncle! I will make him welcome whenever he comes."

"It is a month to-day since I was outside the house," went on the Squire. "Jago tells me that he shall get me out again in three or four days. The man is a man of power; I see it, I feel it. Give him opportunity, and he will make a great name for himself. We will go about again as we used to, Ella; you and I. Why not?"

Ella's heart leaped; she believed the good news. Her uncle had seemed very poorly indeed lately, but she did not suspect he had any incurable malady, or that he was in any danger.

Dr. Jago came to Heron Dyke day after day. In a short while the Squire was walking about the grounds, leaning on Ella's arm or on Hubert Stone's; and he would be seen again driving through Nullington, his niece seated by his side. Ella had grown to think kindly of Dr. Jago; but that old vague feeling of dislike, or distrust, she could not quite get rid of. "There is a look in his eyes I never saw in the eyes of anyone else," she said to herself. "He interests me, and yet repels me."

"The Squire will last out yet to will away his property; ay, and longer than that," cried the gossips of the neighbourhood, as they watched the improvement in him. "It will take more than two doctors to kill a Denzon."

And thus October came in.

About the middle of that month the Squire sent an invitation to Mrs. Carlyon. It was partly in answer to a letter received from her—in which she told them that a certain projected plan of hers, that of going abroad for the winter, was still in abeyance, for she did not much like the idea of going alone. Higson would attend her of course: but who was Higson?—what she needed was a friend.

"She shall take you, Ella," said the Squire, after the letter of invitation was despatched.

"Take me, uncle! Oh dear, no."

"And why not, pray, when I say yes?"

"I could not leave you, Uncle Gilbert."

"Oh, indeed! Could you not, lassie?"

"Suppose you were to be taken ill—and I ever so many hundred miles away! Oh, uncle dear, how could you think of it!"

"Well, I hope I am not likely now to be taken ill. Jago is doing me a marvellous deal of good. Don't fear that. I should like you to go abroad for the winter, lassie, and if Gertrude Carlyon goes, we—we will see about it."

Mrs. Carlyon arrived in due course. It had previously been arranged that, if she did go abroad, she should come to them for a short visit first. It seemed to her that she saw a great change for the worse in Mr. Denison: but she was discreet enough to keep her thoughts on the matter to herself, and chose rather to congratulate him on looking so well.

"Ay," said he, complacently, "the new doctor understands me."

"And don't you think Dr. Spreckley did?" asked Mrs. Carlyon.

"Not of late. Spreckley could not do for me what this man will do."

On the second day of her visit, when they were alone, the Squire questioned Mrs. Carlyon about her plans for the winter. "Have you decided on them, Gertrude?" he asked.

"Not quite," she said. "I suppose, though, I shall go abroad, probably to the South of France. This climate tried my chest severely last winter."

"Ay, I remember. Best for you to go out of it for the next few months."

"An old friend of mine, Mrs. Ord, had decided to accompany me, and now circumstances have intervened to prevent it. That is why I hesitate. I don't care to go so far without a companion."

"You shall take Ella. Come now."

Mrs. Carlyon looked up eagerly. "Take Ella! Are you in earnest?"

"Never more so. Why not? I had meant to make you and London a present of her for the winter: if you go abroad, so much the better. It will be the greater change for her—and she needs change."

"I shall certainly no longer hesitate if I may have Ella," spoke Mrs. Carlyon gladly. "But—I should probably stay away four or five months."

"If you stay away six months it would be all the better. To tell you the truth, Gertrude," he continued, seeing Mrs. Carlyon look surprised, "I do not intend my pretty one to be here during the dark months, and you must take her out of my hands. She has never been quite the same since that curious affair up yonder"—pointing over his shoulder in the direction of the north wing.

Mrs. Carlyon began to understand. "You mean—about Katherine Keen?"

"Ay. Since the girl disappeared ——"

"What a most extraordinary thing that was!" interrupted Mrs. Carlyon. "Can you in any way account for it, Squire?"

"There's no way at all of accounting for it. Bodikins, no!"

"I meant, have you any private theory of your own—as to what can have become of her?"

"I know no more what could have become of her than *that*," returned the Squire, touching his stick, and then striking it on the ground to enforce emphasis. "It has troubled me above a bit, Gertrude, I can tell you. She was as nice and inoffensive a young girl as could be. Only the day before she disappeared she ran all across the garden to me to put my umbrella up, because a drop or two of rain began to fall. You can't think what a modest, kind, good little thing she was."

"I always thought it," assented Mrs. Carlyon. "And I esteem her mother; she is so hardworking and respectable. What a trial

it must have been for her, poor woman! I shall go in and see her before I leave."

"Ay. Why not? Well, it is altogether a very mysterious and unpleasant thing to have happened in this old house, and my pretty lassie, I see, does not forget it. She seems to mope, and to get a bit melancholy now and then. I fancy her eyes are not so bright as they used to be; she doesn't talk so much, or sing so much about the house. It's just as if there was always something hanging over her."

"Of course she must have a change," spoke Mrs. Carlyon.

"She was all the better for her visit to London in spring, but she was not long enough away," went on the Squire. "You know how lonely we are here. My health won't allow of my seeing much company, and Ella doesn't seem to care about extending her acquaintances. It will be horribly dull for her here this winter, with nobody in the house but a sick and cantankerous old man. I wish she could get right away out of England for six or eight months. She would come back to us next spring as merry as a blackbird. Why not, now?"

"I need not say how glad I should be to take Ella with me," said Mrs. Carlyon. "But there's one question—would she go?—would she leave you?"

"Odds bodikins!" cried the Squire angrily, "is the child to set up her will against mine—and yours? It is for her good—and, go she must."

"Do you think you are in a state to be left for a whole winter alone?" debated Mrs. Carlyon, remembering how greatly she at first thought him changed. "Will Ella think it?"

"I! why I am twenty per cent. better than I was a month ago. There's no fear for me. And, if I became ill at any time, couldn't you be telegraphed to? I say that Ella must have a change for her own sake; and what I say, I mean. Come now!"

"Yes; it would no doubt be better for her," assented Mrs. Carlyon, slowly; but, Mr. Denison thought, dubiously.

"Look here, Gertrude: for a woman you've got as sharp a share of sense as here and there one," cried he, lowering his tone as he bent forward towards her. "People have set up all kinds of superstitious notions about the affair; the women here hardly dare stir out of their kitchens after dusk. I find a notion prevails that Katherine is still in the house—is seen sometimes at her window at night. Now, as she can't be in the house alive, you—you must see what that means—folks are such fools, the uneducated ones. But, I put it to you, Gertrude—with this absurd nonsense being whispered about the house, whether it is fit the lassie should spend her winter in it? Eh, now, come!"

He glanced keenly for a moment at Mrs. Carlyon, as if to see whether his words impressed her. And they certainly had. "No it

is not," she assented, speaking firmly, "and I will take her out of it. But—you speak of the young women servants, I suppose, Gilbert? It is not at all seemly that they should be allowed to say such things. See Katherine at her window! How absurd! What next?"

"And profess to hear weird sounds about the passages, whisperings, and such like," added the Squire, as if he had pleasure in repeating this.

"What is Dorothy Stone about, to allow it?"

"Dorothy is worse than they are: she always was the most superstitious woman I ever knew. Not a step dare she stir about the house now after dark. Old Aaron is in a rare rage with her; threatens to shake her sometimes," added the Squire with a grim smile.

"There *can't* be anything in it, you know, Gilbert."

"I don't know," he answered: and Mrs. Carlyon stared at him. "After the disappearance of Katherine into—into air, as may be said, one may well believe any marvel. Eh, now," continued the Squire. "At any rate, Gertrude, it seems to me that we may forgive these poor ignorant people who do believe. But, to go back to the question: Heron Dyke is getting an ill name for mystery, see you, and I do not choose that my innocent lassie shall pass the winter in it."

"Quite right; I perceive all now, and I will take her out of it, Gilbert. At least for two or three of the dark months."

"Two or three months won't do," cried the Squire testily. "It would be of no use. She must not come back until the days are long and bright."

"Well, well, I see how anxious you are for her," said Mrs. Carlyon; who, however, could hardly feel it right to let him be so long alone. "In any case, you would like her to be home before your birthday."

The Squire did not answer. He seemed to be struggling with some inward emotion, and a curious spasm shot across his face. Mrs. Carlyon half rose from her chair, but sat down again.

"Why before my birthday?" said he at length. "It's no more to me than any other day. I never make a festival of it as some idiots do—as if it was something to rejoice over. She needn't come back for my birthday unless I send for her. I shall be sure to send if I want her."

"If you became worse—or weaker—you would send?"

"Ay, ay—why not? Does not one want dear ones by us in sickness? Not but, what with Jago's treatment, I seem to have taken a new lease of life. Look here: I should like the child to see Italy."

"And so she shall. And she will enjoy it, I am sure, provided she can make her mind easy at leaving you. Ella is not like other girls; she is more reasonable," added Mrs. Carlyon. "Look at some flighty young things—thinking of nothing but of getting married."

"Bodikins! the women are generally keen enough after that, nowadays. Ella never seems to care for the young fellows. Young Hanerly wanted her, came to me about it; but she'd have nothing to say to him. Whomsoever she marries, he will have to change his name to Denison. None but a Denison must inherit Heron Dyke."

The thought occurred to Mrs. Carlyon—and it was on the tip of her tongue to say it—that Ella's husband might not inherit Heron Dyke. If the ailing man before her did not live to his next birthday, it must all pass away from Ella. But she kept silence.

"I suppose you never by any chance hear from your cousin Gilbert?" she presently asked, the train of thought prompting the question.

Mr. Denison's face darkened; a cold, hard look came into his eyes. He turned sharply round and faced his questioner, but she was directly regarding the smouldering logs on the hearth. "Hear from my cousin Gilbert!" he said in deep harsh tones. "And pray why should I want to hear from him? I would sooner receive a message from—from the commonest beggar. He would never have the impudence to write to me. Body 'o me! Gilbert, forsooth! He has his spies round the place night and day, I know that; watching and waiting for the moment the breath will go out of me. But they will be deceived—they and their master: yes, Gertrude Carlyon, I tell you that they will be deceived! I am not dead yet, nor likely to die. I shall live to see my seventieth birthday—I know it, I feel it—and not one acre of the old estates shall go to that man!"

He spoke with strange energy. It was evident that the old hatred towards his cousin still burned as fiercely in his heart as it had done forty years before.

"I am afraid that son of his will prove no credit to the name he bears," Mrs. Carlyon remarked after a pause: and the Squire looked up but did not speak. "I am told that some time ago he had a terrible quarrel with his father. They separated in anger and he has not been home since. He is supposed to have enlisted as a common soldier and gone out to India."

Mr. Denison gave a sort of savage snarl. "Ay, ay, that's good news—rare news," he said. "I would give that boy a thousand pounds to keep him away from his father if I only knew where he was—two thousand to anyone who could point out his grave. An only son too. Ah, ah! Rare news!"

At that moment Dr. Jago came in. When he saw the Squire's face, he looked anything but pleased. "Madam," said he to Mrs. Carlyon, "this must not be. If Mr. Denison is to get permanently better, he must be kept free from excitement. It might counteract all the good I am doing him."

Mrs. Carlyon proposed a walk to Ella that lovely October afternoon, after making an enquiry or two in the household about the

unpleasant topic touched on by the Squire. The air was mellow and gracious; and they took their way to the sands, seating themselves on the very spot where Ella had once sat with Edward Conroy. Never did she sit there but she thought of him; of what he had said; of his looks and tones. She wondered whether he was in Africa; she wondered when she should hear of him.

It was low water, and where the vanished tide had been was now a tract of firm yellow sand with hardly a pebble in it; excellent to walk upon. Not till the solitude of the shore was about them did Mrs. Carlyon say a word to her companion on the subject that she had to break to her—their journeying together abroad.

Ella was astonished, hurt; perhaps even a little indignant. Could her uncle really wish her to leave him and to go away for so long when he needed companionship and care? Mrs. Carlyon quietly soothed her, persuaded, reassured her; and finally told her that it was *best it should so be.*

Allowing her niece to go in alone, Mrs. Carlyon turned her steps towards the little inn—the Leaning Gate. She had her curiosity about the doings of that past snowy night in February, just as other people had. The conversation with the Squire and with Dorothy Stone only served to whet it, to puzzle her more than ever, if that were possible; and to enhance her sympathy for poor Katherine's family.

Mrs. Keen was waiting upon a customer who had halted at the inn for the day; Susan had taken her work into the garden. Mrs. Carlyon found her there seated on a rustic bench; she was hemming some new chamber towels. It was a large and pretty garden, filled with homely flowers in summer and with useful vegetables. A great bush of Michaelmas daisies was in blossom now, near the end of the bench. Susan sat without a bonnet, and the sunlight fell on her smooth, brown hair, so soft and fine, just the same pretty hair that Katherine had: indeed, there had been a great resemblance between the sisters. She looked neat as usual—a small white apron on over her dark gown, a white collar at the neck. When she saw Mrs. Carlyon she got up to make her curtsey, and the tears filled her mournful grey eyes. That lady sat down by her and began to speak in a sympathising tone of the past trouble.

"It is not past, ma'am," said Susan, in answer to a remark; "it never will be."

"My good girl, I wanted to talk to you," said Mrs. Carlyon; "I came on purpose. What I have heard about you grieves me so much ——" But here she stopped, for Mrs. Keen came running from the house to greet the visitor. The landlady was a comely woman with ample petticoats and a big white apron.

Naturally, there could be only the one theme of conversation. The tears ran down Mrs. Keen's ruddy cheeks as they pursued it; Susan

was pale, more delicate-looking than ever, and her eyes, dry now, had a far-off look in them. How greatly she put Mrs. Carlyon in mind of Katherine that lady did not choose to say.

"I can understand all your distress, all your trouble," spoke she in a sympathising tone. "And the *uncertainty* as to what became of her is the most cruel phase of all."

"*Something* must have interrupted her when she had just begun to undress; that seems to be evident, ma'am," said the mother. "She had taken off her cap and apron, her collar and ribbon—and all else that she had on disappeared with her. The question is, what that something could be. Susan thinks—but I'm afraid she thinks a great deal that is but idleness," broke off the mother, with a fond, pitying glance at the girl.

"What does Susan think?" asked Mrs. Carlyon.

Susan lifted her white face to answer. The vacant look it mostly wore was very perceptible now; her tone became dull and monotonous. "Ma'am," she said, "I think that when Katherine had just got those few things off, somebody came to her door, and—and ——"

"And what?" said Mrs. Carlyon, for the girl had stopped.

"I wish I knew what. I wish I could think what; but I can't. Some days I think he must have taken her out of the room, and some days I think he killed her in it. It fairly dazes me, ma'am."

"Whom do you mean by 'he'?" again questioned Mrs. Carlyon, wondering whether the girl had anyone in particular in her mind.

"It must have been some stranger, some wicked man that we don't know—or a woman," answered Susan, slowly. "Miss Winter had gone down then and was out of hearing."

"But there was no stranger at Heron Dyke that night, either man or woman," objected Mrs. Carylon. "Only the women servants, old Aaron, the Squire, and Miss Winter."

"Somebody might have been hid in the house. She'd not go out of the room, ma'am, of her own accord."

"Not unless she had something to go for," said Mrs. Carlyon; "though I do not see what it was likely to be," she slowly added. "Or, if she did go out, why did she not go back again?"

"Ma'am," spoke the landlady, "against that theory there's the fact that she left the candle behind her. Miss Winter found it burnt down to the socket. If she had gone out of the room she would have taken the light with her."

"It is a great mystery," mused Mrs. Carlyon. "What could have become of her? Where can she be?"

"She was hurt in some way, or else frightened," said Susan. "Screams of terror, those two were, that I heard."

"With regard to those screams," returned Mrs. Carlyon, "the singular thing is that no one else heard them; no one in the house."

"Tom Barnet heard them, ma'am, the coachman's boy," interposed the mother, smoothing down the sleeve of her lilac cotton gown. "I

can't think there's any doubt but that the screams came from Katherine. I'd give—I'd give all I'm worth to know where she is, dead or alive."

"She is inside Heron Dyke!" cried Susan, her voice taking a sound of awe.

"Nonsense," somewhat impatiently rebuked Mrs. Carlyon. "You ought to know that it cannot be, Susan."

Susan lifted her patient face, a pleading kind of look on it. "Ma'am, she's there; she's there. I've seen her at the window of her room in the moonlight; it's three times now."

"Run in, Susie; I thought I heard the gentleman's bell," spoke her mother, and Susan gathered up her work and went. But Mrs. Carlyon saw it was only a ruse to get rid of her.

"She is growing almost silly upon the point, ma'am," Mrs. Keen began; "thinking she sees her sister at the window. I believe it's all fancy, for my part; nothing but the reflection of some tree branches cast on the window-blind by the moon."

"Why don't you forbid her going up to Heron Dyke in the dark?" sensibly asked Mrs. Carlyon. "It cannot be good for her."

"Because, ma'am, I'm feared that if I did her mind would quite lose its balance," replied the mother. "I do stop her all I can; but I dare not do it quite always. The going up there to watch the windows for Katherine has become like meat and drink to her."

Mrs. Carlyon sighed. Throughout the interview the landlady had never ceased to wipe her tears away; they rose in spite of her. It was altogether a very distressing case, and Mrs. Carlyon wished it had occurred anywhere rather than at Heron Dyke.

"I suppose Katherine had no trouble? She was not in bad spirits?" she remarked.

"She had no trouble in the world that I know of; there was none that she could have. Susan met her in Nullington the morning of the very day it happened, and she was as blithe as could be. Miss Winter was making some flannel petticoats for the poor little neglected Tysons, and found she had not got enough flannel to cut out the last, so she sent Katherine for another yard of it, charging her to make haste. Well, ma'am, Susan met her, as I tell you; and, as Katherine was going back to the Hall, she saw me standing at the door here. 'I hear you have heard from John, mother,' she called out; and her face was bright and her voice cheerful as a lark's; 'Susan says she will bring me up the letter this evening.' 'Come in for it now, child,' I answered her. 'No,' she said, 'if I came in I should be sure to stop talking with you, and Miss Winter is waiting for what I've been to fetch. You'll let Susan bring it up this evening, mother.' 'If the weather holds up,' I answered, glancing at the skies, which seemed to threaten a fall of some sort; 'but her cold hangs about her, and I can't let her go out at night if rain comes on.' With that she nodded to me and ran on laughing; she used to think

it a joke, the care I took of Susan. No, ma'am," concluded the mother, "my poor Katherine was in no trouble of mind."

Mrs. Carlyon went back to the Hall full of thought. One thing she could not understand—how it was, if Katherine had screamed, that she should have been heard out of doors, and not indoors. And Mrs. Carlyon, that same evening, when she was dressing for dinner, sent Higson for Dorothy Stone, telling the maid she need not come back; and she put the question to Dorothy.

Mrs. Stone went into a twitter forthwith. The least allusion to the subject invariably sent her into one. No, the cry had not been heard indoors, she answered. Neither by the master nor Miss Ella, who were shut up in the oak sitting-room, nor by her and the maids in the kitchen. But the north wing was ever so far off, and she did not think they could have heard it. The only one about the house was Aaron, and he ought to have heard it, if any scream had been screamed.

"And he did not hear it?" spoke Mrs. Carlyon.

"Aaron heard nothing, ma'am," replied the housekeeper. "The corridors and passages, above and below, were just as silent as they always are, inside this great lonely house at night; and that's as silent as the grave. Aaron was locking-up, and could well have heard any scream in the north wing. He was longer than usual that night, as it chanced, for he got his oil, and was oiling the front-door lock, which had grown a bit rusty. Had there been any noise in the north wing, screaming, or what not, he could not have failed to hear it: and for that reason he holds to it to this day that there was none; that the screams Susan Keen professed to hear were just her flighty fancy."

"And do you think so, Dorothy?"

"Ma'am, I don't know what to say," answered the old woman, pushing back her grey hair; as she was apt to do when in a puzzle of thought. "I should think it was the girl's fancy but for Tom Barnet. Tom holds to it that the two screams were there, sure enough, just as Susan does; the last a good deal fainter than the first."

"There's the dinner-gong!" exclaimed Mrs. Carlyon, as the sound boomed up from below. "And none of my ornaments on yet. Clasp this bracelet for me, will you, Dorothy. We will talk more of this another time. Dr. Jago dines here to-night, I hear: what a fancy the Squire seems to have taken to him!"

CHAPTER XII.

FAREWELL.

THE day of departure was here, bringing with it Ella's last afternoon at Heron Dyke for several weeks, or it might be, for several

months to come. Her uncle's will in the matter, combined with Mrs. Carlyon's, had conquered her own. Dr. Jago added his influence in the shape of a warning, that his patient must on no account be irritated by contradiction or he would not be answerable for the consequences. Ella felt that there was no other course open to her than to yield; but she cried many bitter tears in secret. She did not want to leave home at all just now, although ten days or a fortnight in Paris might have proved a pleasant change. But to go away for a whole winter, and so far away too, was certainly something that she had never contemplated. It was true that Mr. Denison seemed better in health, much better; but, for all that, she had a presentiment which she could not get rid of, that if she left him now she should never see him again in this world. Still, she had to obey her uncle's wishes.

And now the last afternoon was here, and waning quickly. She had bidden farewell to Maria Kettle, to Lady Cleeve, and all other friends; she had taken her last walk along the shore, her last look at the garden and grounds, each familiar spot had been visited in turn; and it had seemed to her as though she were bidding them farewell for ever. She and Mrs. Carlyon were going up to London by the evening train; they would spend a couple of days in town and then cross by the Dover boat.

Through the leaden-paned windows of Mr. Denison's sitting-room the rays of the October sun shone wanly, lighting up a point of panelling here and there, or lending a momentary freshness, a forgotten grace, to one or other of the faded portraits on the walls. As the sick man sat there in his big leathern chair, his dim eyes wandered now and again to the motto of his family where, lighted by the sun, it shone out in colours blood-red and golden high up in the central window. There was a ring of worldly pride in the words, of the strength and the glory of possession. "What I have I hold." How much longer would he, the living head of the house, continue to hold anything of that which earth had given him? Already the cold airs of the grave blew about him: already he seemed to hear the dread words, "Ashes to ashes," while from the sexton's clay-stained fingers a little earth was crumbled on to his coffin lid. "What I have I hold." Vain mockery! when the grim Captain whispers in your ear, and bids you follow him.

Ella sat on a low hassock at her uncle's knee. One of her hands was tightly grasped in his, while his other hand stroked her hair fondly. It was a gaunt and bony hand and seemed all unfitted for such loving usages. They spoke to each other in low tones with frequent pauses between. To any stranger there, who could have heard their voices but not their words, it would have seemed as if they were discussing some trivial topic of every-day life. But both Ella and the Squire had determined that they would keep a strict guard over their feelings. Neither of them would let the other see

the emotions at work below, though each might guess at their existence. Dr. Jago had warned the young lady to make her parting as quiet a one as possible: excitement of any kind was so hurtful for him. Mr. Denison's proud hard nature could not entirely change itself even at a time like the present; besides which, he wanted to make the separation as little distressing to Ella as might be. It may be that he felt that if she were to break down at the last moment and betray much emotion, his own veneer of stoicism might not prove of much avail.

"I think, Uncle Gilbert, you understand clearly the arrangements made for our communicating with each other while I am away?" said Ella.

"I think so, my pretty one. You can go over them again if you like."

"I will write to you once a week and send you a telegram as often as we leave one place for another. Hubert Stone will write to me in your name every Monday to save you from fatigue; and you must write sometimes yourself. Should your health change in the slightest degree for the worse, he will telegraph to me without a moment's delay."

"That's it: I sha'n't forget," said Mr. Denison. "What with this telegraphing, and one thing or another, it will seem as if you were no further away than the next village."

"I shall feel that we are very far apart," said Ella. "You forget what a long time it takes to travel from Italy to Heron Dyke."

"Nothing like the time it used to take when I was a young spark. I remember when I went the grand tour as it was called—but there, there, we have something else to talk about now. Anyhow, railroads are a wonderful invention."

There were twenty things on Ella's tongue that she would have liked to speak of, but that it might be more wise to refrain from. Dr. Jago's warning words rarely left her thoughts.

"Be sure to wrap yourself up warmly when you go out in the carriage, uncle."

"Ay, ay, dearie, I won't forget."

"I shall come back to you the first week in the new year. Two months will be quite long enough to be away from home."

"We have agreed to see about that, you know, my lassie. I will send you word when I feel that I want you, and then you will come. Not before, I think—not before."

It was a topic that Ella dared not pursue further. She kissed his hand with tears in her eyes. He patted her cheek lovingly. "Oh! why does he persist so strongly in sending me away?" she thought. "Hubert let fall a word—an inadvertent one, I think—the other night, that they feared I should be melancholy in this gloomy old house in the winter. It is gloomy now, but I could have put up with that very well."

"If I get on as famously for the next month or two as I have for

the last three weeks," said the Squire, "I shall be able to drive to the station and meet you when you come home. And then when the sun comes out warm next spring, I can take your arm, and we can walk again in the peach alley as we used to do. Why not?"

Was there something wistful in his voice, as he spoke thus, that caused Ella to glance up quickly into his face? "Are you sure, uncle, that you are really as much stronger and better as you say you are?" she asked quickly, and with ill-concealed anxiety.

One of his old suspicious flashes came into his eyes: but it died away next moment. "Am I sure, dearie? Why—why, what makes you ask that? You can see for yourself that I'm better. Yes, Jago's making another man of me—another man."

"Tell me the truth, uncle," she exclaimed passionately, "*why* is it that you are driving me away? I am sure there is some special reason for it."

For a moment or two the Squire did not answer: his face was working with some inward excitement, his fingers, stroking the hand he held, trembled visibly.

"The house is getting uncanny, child," he said at last, "and I won't suffer my pretty one to be in it for the dark months. Before another winter comes round, perhaps the mystery will be solved; I hope it will be. Any way, we shall by that time have become more reconciled to it."

"But, uncle ——"

"No objection, my dear one. You have never made any to my will yet, and you must not begin now. Understand, child: I am sending you away for *the best;* the best for you and for me; and you must be guided by me implicitly, as you ever have been."

Ella sighed—and would not let him see her tears.

The yellow sunlight faded and vanished from the gloomy room, the old portraits on the walls shrank farther back into the twilight of their frames and were lost to view, the log on the hearth crackled and glowed more redly bright as darkness crept on apace, and still those two sat hand in hand, speaking a few words now and then, but mostly silent. At length the moment of departure came, the carriage was at the door, and Mrs. Carlyon entered, ready for travelling.

The Squire grasped the back of his chair with one hand; he was trembling in every limb. Mrs. Carlyon bade him good-bye quietly and without fuss. He kissed her, and held her hand. "Gertrude," he said," into your hands I commit my one earthly treasure. I charge you with the care of it. Never forget!"

Ella clung to him, and laid her head upon his breast. His rugged features worked convulsively. He lifted her face tenderly between his hands, and kissed her several times. "Let me stay with you, uncle. Why drive me away?" she said imploringly.

For a moment there came into his eyes a gleam of agony terrible to see: it was a look which Ella never forgot. "No—no—it must

not be: I am doing for the best," he repeated, in a hoarse whisper; "I tell it you. Farewell, my sweetest and best—farewell. Go now—go now," he whispered, as he sank into his chair and pointed to the door.

Hubert Stone, looking every inch a gentleman, attended them to the station, sitting on the box with Barnet. Higson went inside with the ladies. At the station, Ella took Hubert aside for a private word.

"You will be sure not to forget your instructions, Hubert?"

"I shall not forget one of them, Miss Ella," was his answer. "You may rely upon that."

"You must watch my uncle narrowly. Should you see the approach of any change in him, telegraph to me. Question your friend, Dr. Jago, continually of his state. Say nothing to my uncle. I will take the responsibility if you send for me. You will always know where we are, for I shall keep you well-informed."

The young man bowed. He was afraid to let his eyes meet hers: she might perhaps have fathomed the burning secret that lay half hidden there—his passionate love.

"I trust you, Hubert; remember that: I have only you to trust to now at Heron Dyke. And now, good-bye."

Hubert clasped the hand she extended to him. And the next moment he assisted her into the carriage.

"Ah, if I might dare to think it would ever be!" he groaned, watching the train as it puffed out of the station. "And, I do think it may, I fear, more than is wholesome for me; for the hope is little short of madness."

At that time the county of Norfolk had been startled from its propriety by the ill-judged action of a young lady belonging to the family of one of its magnates. She had married one of her father's men-servants. Hubert Stone lit his cigar, and quitted the station to return home, thinking of this. Strange to say, he saw in it some encouragement for himself.

"If Miss G. can stoop to marry a low fellow like that, surely there's nothing so very outrageous in my aspiring to Ella Winter! I am well educated; I can behave as a gentleman; I am good-looking. There's nothing against me but birth—and fortune. *She* will have enough of the latter if she comes into Heron Dyke—and if Jago's clever, I expect she will. Any way her fortune will be a fair one, for the Squire must have saved hoards of money. She can well afford to dispense with money in whomsoever she may marry: and if she can only be brought to overlook the disadvantage of my birth ——"

"Good evening, Mr. Stone. And how's the Squire?"

Hubert's dreams were thus cut short. He answered the question mechanically, and stopped to talk to the chance acquaintance who had accosted him.

Meanwhile Ella and Mrs. Carlyon were speeding London-ward as fast as the Great Eastern Railway could carry them. At Cambridge

there was a stoppage for two or three minutes. Suddenly Mrs. Carlyon uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Ella, look! Look there! that is surely Mr. Conroy. He is looking for a seat."

Ella bent forward. The next moment Mr. Conroy recognised them. He advanced to the carriage window, and raised his hat.

"Who, in the name of wonder, expected to see you here?" exclaimed Mrs. Carlyon, as she held out her hand. "I thought you were in Ashantee."

"It is one of my privileges to turn up in unexpected places," he answered. Then he shook hands with Ella and enquired after Mr. Denison.

"Were you looking for a place?—are you going to town?" asked Mrs. Carlyon. "If you don't mind travelling with unprotected females, there's plenty of room here."

And, thanking her, into the carriage stepped Edward Conroy, with the frank look and smile that Ella remembered so well.

"Well, if he is not a cool one!" thought the discerning Higson to to herself. "I'd not mind answering for it that in some way he got to know Miss Ella would be here, and came down from town on purpose to meet her. I can read it in his eyes. There's no answering for what these venturesome young gents will do!"

"And will you kindly explain to us, Mr. Conroy, what business you have to be in England when you ought to be sketching black people out in Africa?"

"Within twenty-four hours of the time I was to have sailed, I received a telegram informing me that my father was dangerously ill. Under the circumstances, I could not sail; I had to go to him instead. I stayed some time with him, left him better, and then found that Dempster had been sent in my place."

"And a very fortunate thing too."

Conroy laughed. "You lack enterprise, Mrs. Carlyon. I am afraid that you would never do for a special correspondent. Do you expect to make a long stay in London this time?" he asked, turning to Ella.

"We intend starting for the Continent the day after to-morrow," answered Mrs. Carlyon. "You had better come and dine with us to-morrow evening: there will be no one but ourselves and Mr. Bootle."

"I shall be very happy to do so," replied Conroy. "What place are you going to make your head-quarters while you are away?"

"I had some thoughts of San Remo, but we shall probably be birds of passage and not stay long in any one place."

Conroy saw that Ella was silent, and guessed the parting with her uncle had been a sad one. What he did not know was, how sweet his presence and company were to her. She had been thinking of him that very day—thinking of him sadly as of one whom she might never see again; and now he was here, sitting opposite to her. What

rare chance had brought him?—She did not talk much, she was satisfied to hear his voice and see his face; at present she craved nothing more. The journey she so much dreaded had all at once been invested with a charm, with an unexpected sweetness, which she never tried to analyse: enough for her that it was there.

Conroy saw the ladies into their carriage at the London terminus, and bade them good-bye till the following evening.—Then he lighted a cigar and set out to walk to his rooms in the Adelphi. He was in a musing mood, debating some question with himself as he walked along.

"Shall I tell Mrs. Carlyon a certain secret, or shall I not?" he thought. "Would she keep it to herself? No, no; better be on the safe side," he presently decided: "and the time is hardly ripe to tell it to anyone. What would Squire Denison say if it were whispered to him?"

On this very evening, while these ladies were on their way to London, a strange thing happened at Heron Dyke.

It was about eight o'clock. Fitch the saddler had come up from Nullington about some little matter of business, and Aaron Frost sent one of the housemaids to fetch him a certain whip that was hanging in the hall. As Martha left the room with her candle she met her fellow-servant, Ann, and the latter turned to accompany her. The girls never cared to go about the big house singly after dark. They went along chattering merrily, and thinking of anything rather than unpleasant subjects. Martha was repeating a ludicrous story just told in the kitchen by the saddler, and could hardly tell it for laughing.

As in many old mansions, round three sides of the entrance hall there ran an oaken gallery, some twenty-feet above the ground, from which various doors gave access to different parts of the house. This gallery was reached from the hall by a broad and shallow flight of stairs.

"How cold this place always strikes one," exclaimed Ann as they entered the hall.

"It would want many a dozen of candles to light it up properly," remarked Martha.

Having found the whip, they turned to retrace their steps, when Martha, happening to glance up at the gallery, gave utterance to a low cry, and grasped her companion by the arm. Ann's eyes involuntarily followed the same direction, and a similar cry of intense terror burst from her lips.

They saw the face of the missing girl—the face of Katherine Keen, gazing down upon them from the gallery. The face was very pale; white as that of the dead. The figure was leaning over the balustrade of the gallery and its eyes gazed down into theirs with a sad, fixed, weary look. It seemed to be clothed in something dark, pulled partly over its head and grasped at the throat by the white, slender

fingers. For fully half a minute, the two girls stood and stared up at the figure in sheer incapability, and the figure looked sadly down upon them. At length it moved—it turned—it took a step forward, and the servants, both of them, distinctly heard the sound of a faint far-away sigh. Could it be possible that the figure meant to come down stairs? The spell that had held the girls was broken; with low smothered cries of terror they turned and fled, clinging to each other.

How the one dropped the whip and the other the candle, and how they at length gained the kitchen, and burst into it with their terror-stricken faces and their unhappy tale, they never knew. Fitch the saddler gazed in open-eyed amazement, as well he might; the deaf and stolid cook looked in from the cooking-kitchen—in which congenial place she preferred to sit, surrounded by her saucepans.

The girls sobbed forth all the dismal story. Their mistress, Mrs. Stone, flung her apron over her head as she listened, and sank back in her chair in dismay equal to theirs. But old Aaron was so indignant, so scandalised, at what he called their imaginative folly, that he lost his breath in a rage, and gave each of them a month's warning on the spot.

(To be continued.)

CUCKOO SONG.

CUCKOO! cuckoo! in dawning daylight calling,
When white mists cling to river-beds and reeds;
Cuckoo! cuckoo! when evening shades are falling,
Again your voice along the twilight meads.

It rains! sharp hailstone balls in laurel arches
Storm, rattle, patter, and the clouds hang near;
While hidden from sight, 'mid slender aisles of larches,
You hopeful call monotonously clear.

It shines! smile bravely, earth, in all your splendour;
Green lawns and lilies greet the wooing sun:
Cuckoo! cuckoo! in tones half-gay, half-tender,
Sing to the world that summer is begun.

s ings my love, too, rain or shiny weather;
She, like the cuckoo, soft voiced, changes not.
So sing, sweetheart, while we two walk together,
With chequered storm and sunshine for our lot!

G. B. STUART.

VERENA FONTAINE'S REBELLION.

IT was a dreadful thing to have happened. Edward Pym found dead; and no one could tell for a certainty who had been the author of the calamity.

He had died of a blow dealt to him, the doctors said: it had struck him behind the left ear. Could it be possible that he had fallen of himself, and struck his head against something in falling, was a question put to the doctors—and it was Captain Tanerton who put it. It perhaps might be possible, the medical men answered, but not at all probable. Mr. Pym could not have inflicted the blow upon himself, and there was no piece of furniture in the room, so far as they saw, that could have caused the injury, even though he had fallen upon it.

The good luck of the *Rose of Delhi* seemed not to be in the ascendant. Her commander could not sail with her now. Neither could her newly appointed third mate, Alfred Saxby. So far as might be ascertained at present, Captain Tanerton was the last man who had seen Pym alive; Alfred Saxby had found him dead; therefore their evidence would be required at the official investigation.

Ships, however, cannot be lightly detained in port when their time for sailing comes: and on the day following the events already told of, the *Rose of Delhi* finally left the docks, all taut and sound, the only one of her old officers, sailing in her, being Mark Ferrar. The brokers were put out frightfully at the detention of Tanerton. A third mate was soon found to replace Saxby: a master not so easily. They put in an elderly man, just come home in command of one of their ships. Put him in for the nonce, hoping Captain Tanerton would be at liberty to join her at Dartmouth, or some other place down channel.

On this same day, Tuesday, the investigation into the events of that fatal Monday, as regarded Edward Pym, was begun. Not the coroner's inquest: that was called for the morrow: but an informal inquiry instituted by the brokers and Sir Dace Fontaine. In a back room of the office in Eastcheap, the people met; and—I am glad to say—I was one of them, or I could not have told you what passed. Sir Dace sat in the corner, his elbow resting on the desk and his hand partly covering his face. He did not pretend to feel the death as an affectionate uncle would have felt it; still Pym was his nephew, and there could be no mistake that the affair was troubling him.

Mrs. Richenough, clean as a new pin, in her Sunday gown and close bonnet, a puzzled look upon her wrinkled face, told what

she knew—and was longer over it than she need have been. Mr. Pym, who lodged in her parlour floor, had left her for good, as she supposed, on the Monday morning, his ship, the *Rose of Delhi*, being about to go out of dock. Mr. Saxby, who had lodged in the rooms above Mr. Pym, got appointed to the same ship, and he also left. In the afternoon she heard that the ship had got off all right: a workman at the docks told her so. Later, who should come to the door but Mr. Pym—which naturally gave her great surprise. He told her the ship had sprung a leak and had put back; but they should be off again with the next day's tide, and he should have to be abroad precious early in the morning to get the cargo stowed away again ——

"What time was this?" interrupted Mr. Freeman.

"About half-past four, I fancy, sir. Mr. Pym spoke rather thick—I saw he had been taking a glass. He bade me make him a big potful of strong tea—which I did at once, having the kettle on the fire. He drank it, and went out."

"Go on, Mrs. Richenough."

"An hour afterwards, or so, his captain called, wanting to know where he was. Of course, sirs, I could not say; except that he had had a big jorum of tea, and was gone out."

Captain Tanerton spoke up to confirm this. "I wanted Pym," he said. "This must have been between half-past five and six o'clock."

"About nine o'clock; or a bit earlier, it might be—I know it was dark and I had finished my supper—Mr. Pym came back," resumed the landlady. "He seemed in an ill-humour, and he had been having more to drink. 'Light my lamp, Mother Richenough,' says he roughly, 'and shut the shutters: I've got a letter to write.' I lighted the lamp, and he got out some paper of his that was left in the table-drawer, and the ink, and sat down. After closing the shutters I went to the front door, and there I saw Captain Tanerton. He asked me ——"

"What did he ask you?" cried Mr. Freeman's lawyer, for she had come to a dead standstill.

"Well, the Captain asked me whether any young lady had been there. He had asked the same question afore, sir: Mr. Pym's cousin, or sister, I b'lieve he meant. I told him No, and he went into the parlour to Mr. Pym."

"What then?"

"Well, gentlemen, I went back to my kitchen, and shut myself in by my bit o' fire; and, being all lonely like, I a'most dozed off. Not quite; they made so much noise in the parlour, quarrelling."

"Quarrelling?" cried the lawyer.

"Yes, sir; and were roaring out at one another like wolves. Mr. ——"

"Stay a moment, ma'am. How long was it after you admitted Captain Tanerton that you heard this quarrelling?"

"Not above three or four minutes, sir. I'm sure of that. 'Mr. Pym's catching it from his captain, and he is just in the right mood to take it unkindly,' I thought to myself. However, it was no business of mine. The sounds soon ceased, and I was just dozing off again, when Mr. Saxby came home. He went into the parlour to see Mr. Pym, and found him lying dead on the floor."

A dead pause.

"You are sure, ma'am, it was Captain Tanerton who was quarrelling with him?" cried the lawyer, who asked more questions than all the rest put together.

"Of course I am sure," returned Mrs. Richenough. "Why, sir, how could it be anybody else? Hadn't I just let in Captain Tanerton to him? Nobody was there but their two selves."

Naturally the room turned to Jack. He answered the mute appeal very quietly.

"It was not myself that quarrelled with Pym. No angry word of any kind passed between us. Pym had been drinking; Mrs. Richenough is right in that. He was not in a state to be reproved or reasoned with, and I came away at once. I did not stay to sit down."

"You hear this, Mrs. Richenough?"

"Yes, sir, I do; and I am sure the gentleman don't speak or look like one who could do such a deed. But, then, I heard the quarrelling."

An argument indisputable to her own mind. Sir Dace looked up and put a question for the first time. He had listened in silence. His dark face had a wearied look on it, and he spoke hardly above a whisper.

"Did you know the voice to be that of Captain Tanerton, Mistress Landlady? Did you recognise it for his?"

"I knew the voice couldn't be anybody else's, sir. Nobody but the Captain was with Mr. Pym."

"I asked you whether you *recognised* it?" returned Sir Dace, knitting his brow. "Did you know by its tone that it was Captain Tanerton's?"

"Well, no, sir, I did not, if you put it in that way. Captain Tanerton was nearly a stranger to me, and the two shut doors and the passage was between me and him. I had only heard him speak once or twice before, and then in a pleasant, ordinary voice. In this quarrel his voice was raised to a high, rough pitch; and in course I could not know it for his."

"In point of fact, then, it comes to this: You did *not* recognise the voice for Captain Tanerton's."

"No, sir; not, I say, if you put it in that light."

"Let me put it in this light," was Sir Dace Fontaine's testy rejoinder: "Had three or four people been with Mr. Pym in his parlour, you could not have told whose voice it was quarrelling with him? You would not have known?"

"That is so, sir. But, you see, I knew it was his captain that was with him."

Sir Dace folded his arms and leaned back in his chair, his cross-questioning over. Mrs. Richenough was done with for the present, and Captain Tanerton entered upon his version of the night's events.

"I wished particularly to see Mr. Pym, and went to Ship Street in search of him, as I have already said. He was not there. Later, I went down again ——"

"I beg your pardon, Captain Tanerton," interrupted the lawyer; "what time do you make it—that second visit?"

"It must have been nearly nine o'clock. Mr. Pym was at home, and I went into his parlour. He sat at the table writing, or preparing to write. I asked him the question I had come to ask, and he answered me. Scarcely anything more passed between us. He was three-parts tipsy. I had intended to tell him that he was no longer chief mate of my ship—had been superseded; but, seeing his condition, I did not. I can say positively that I was not more than two minutes in the room."

"And you and he did not quarrel?"

"We did not. Neither were our voices raised. It is very probable, in his then condition, that he would have attempted to quarrel had he known he was discharged; but he did not know it. We were perfectly civil to each other; and when I wished him good-night, he came into the passage and shut the front door after me."

"You left no one with him?"

"No one; so far as I saw. I can answer for it that no one was in the parlour with us: whether anyone was in the back room I cannot say. I do not think so."

"After that, Captain Tanerton?"

"After that I went straight to my hotel in the Minories, and ordered tea. While taking it, Mr. Ferrar came in and told me Edward Pym was dead. I could not at first believe it. I went back to Ship Street and found it too true. In as short a time as I could manage it, I went to carry the news to Sir Dace Fontaine, taking young Saxby with me."

Jack had spoken throughout in the ready, unembarrassed manner of one who tells a true tale. But never in all my life had I seen him so quiet and subdued. He was like one who has some great care upon him. The other hearers, not knowing Jack as I knew him, would not notice this; though I cannot answer for it that one of them did not—James Freeman. He never took his eyes off Jack all the while; peered at him as if he were a curiosity. It was not an open stare; more of a surreptitious one, taken stealthily from under his eyebrows.

Some testimony as to Pym's movements that afternoon was obtained from Mrs. Ball, the lawyer having already been to Woburn Place to get it. She said that young Pym came to her house between five

and six o'clock—nearer six than five, she thought, and seemed very much put out and disappointed to find Miss Verena Fontaine had left for her own home. He spoke of the ship's having sprung a leak and put back again, but he believed she would get out again on the morrow. Mrs. Ball did not notice that he had been drinking; but one of her servants met him in the street after he left the house, heard him swearing to himself, and saw him turn into a public-house. If he remained in it until the time he next appeared in Ship Street, his state then was not to be wondered at.

This was about all that had been gathered at present. A great deal of talking took place, but no opinion was expressed by anybody. Time enough for that when the jury met on the morrow. As we were turning out of the back room, the meeting over, Mr. Freeman put his hand upon Jack, to detain him. Jack, in his turn, detained me.

"Captain Tanerton," he said, in a grave whisper, "do you remember making a remark to me not long ago, in this, my private room—that if we persisted in sending Pym out with you in the ship, there would be murder committed?"

"I believe I do," said Jack, quietly. "They were foolish words, and meant nothing."

"I do not like to remember them," pursued Mr. Freeman. "As things have turned out, it would have been better that you had not used them."

"Perhaps so," answered Jack. "They have done no harm, that I know of."

"They have been singularly verified. The man has been murdered."

"Not on board the *Rose of Delhi*."

"No. Off it."

"I should rather call it death by misadventure," said Jack, looking calmly at the broker. "At the worst, done in a scuffle; possibly in a fall."

"Most people, as I think you will find, will call it murder, Captain Tanerton."

"I fear they will."

Mr. Freeman stood before Jack, waiting—at least it struck me so—to hear him add, 'But I did not commit it'—or words to that effect. I waited too. Jack never spoke them: he remained silent and still. Since the past day his manner had changed. All the light-hearted ease had gone out of it; the sunny temperament seemed exchanged for thought and gloom.

Fine tidings to travel down to Timberdale!

On Wednesday, the day following this, the Squire stood at the gate of Crabb Cot after breakfast, looking this way and that. Dark clouds were chasing each other over the face of the sky, now

obscuring the sun, now leaving it to shine out with intense fierceness.

"It won't do to-day," cried the Squire. "It's too windy, Joe. The fish would not bite."

"They'd bite fast enough," said Tod, who had set his mind upon a day's fishing, and wanted the Squire to go with him.

"Feel that gust, Joe! Why, if—halloa, here comes Letsom!"

Colonel Letsom was approaching at the pace of a steam-engine, his mild face longer than usual. Tod laughed.

The Colonel, never remembering to say How d'ye do, or to shake hands, dragged two letters out of his pocket, all in a flurry.

"Such fearful news, Todhetley!" he exclaimed. "Pym—you remember that poor Pym?"

"What should hinder me?" cried the Squire. "A fine dance we had, looking for him and Verena Fontaine the other night in London! What of Pym?"

"He is dead!" gasped the Colonel. "Murdered."

The Pater took off his spectacles, thinking they must affect his hearing, and stared.

"And it is thought," added the Colonel, "that—that Captain Tanerton did it."

"Good mercy, Letsom! You can't mean it."

Colonel Letsom's answer was to read out portions of the two letters. One of them was written to his daughter Mary Ann by Coralie Fontaine; three sheets full. She gave much the same history of the calamity that has been given above. It could not have been done by any hand but Captain Tanerton's, she said; though of course not intentionally; nobody thought that: her father, Sir Dace, scorned any worse idea. Altogether, it was a dreadful thing; it had struck Verena into a kind of wild despair, and bewildered them all. And in a postscript she added what she had apparently forgotten to say before—that Captain Tanerton denied it.

Tod looked up, a flush on his face. "One thing may be relied upon, Colonel—that if Tanerton did do it, he will avow it. He would never deny it."

"This other letter is from Sir Dace," said the Colonel, after putting Coralie's aside. And he turned round that we might look over his shoulder while he read it.

It gave a much shorter account than Coralie's; a *lighter* account, as if he took a less grave view of the affair; and it concluded with these words. "Suspicion lies upon Tanerton. I think unjustly. Allowing that he did do it, it could only have been done by a smartly-provoked blow, devoid of ill-intention. No one knows better than myself how quarrelsome and overbearing that unfortunate young man was. But I, for one, believe what Tanerton says—that he was not even present when it happened. I am inclined to think that Pym, in his

unsteady state, must in some way have fallen when alone, and struck his head fatally."

"Sir Dace is right; I'll lay my fortune upon it," cried Tod warmly.

"Don't talk quite so fast about your fortune, Joe; wait till you've got one," rebuked the Pater. "I must say it is grievous news, Letsom. It has upset me."

"I am off now to show the letters to Paul," said the Colonel. "It will be but neighbourly, as he is a connection of the Fontaines."

Shaking hands, he turned away on the road to Islip. The Squire, leaning on the gate, appeared to be looking after him: in reality he was deep in a brown study.

"Joe," said he, in a tone that had a sound of awe in it, "this is curious, taken in conjunction with what Alice Tanerton told us yesterday morning."

"Well, it does seem rather queer," conceded Tod. "Something like the dream turning up trumps."

"Trumps?" retorted the Pater.

"Truth, then. Poor Alice!"

A singular thing had happened. Especially singular, taken in conjunction (as the Squire put it) with this unfortunate news. And when the reader hears the whole, though it won't be just yet, he will be ready to call out, It is not true. But it is true. And this one only fact, with its truth and its singularity, induced me to recount the history.

II.

On Tuesday morning, the day after the calamity in Ship Street —you perceive that we go back a day—the Squire and Tod turned out for a walk. They had no wish to go anywhere in particular, and their steps might just as well have been turned Crabb way as Timberdale way—or, for that matter, any other way. The morning was warm and bright: they strolled towards the Ravine, went through it, and so on to Timberdale.

"We may as well call and see how Herbert Tanerton is, as we are here," remarked the Squire. For Herbert had a touch of hay-fever. He was always getting something or other.

The Rector was better. They found him pottering about his garden; that prolific back garden from which we once saw—if you don't forget it—poor, honest, simple-minded Jack bringing strawberries on a cabbage-leaf for crafty Aunt Dean. The suspected hay-fever turned out to be a bit of a cold in the head: but the Rector could not have looked more miserable had it been in the heart.

"What's the matter with you now?" cried the Squire, who never gave in to Herbert's fancies.

"Matter enough," he growled in answer: "to have a crew of ridiculous women around you, no better than babies! Here's Alice in a world of a way about Jack, proclaiming that some harm has happened to him."

"What harm? Does she know of any?"

"No, she does not know of any," croaked Herbert, flicking a growing gooseberry off a bush with the rake. "She says a dream disclosed it to her."

The Pater stared. Tod threw up his head with a laugh.

"You might have thought she'd got her death-warrant read out to her, so white and trembling did she come down," continued Herbert in an injured tone. "She had dreamt a dream, foreshadowing evil to Jack, she began to tell us—and not a morsel of breakfast could she touch."

"But that's not like Alice," continued the Squire. "She is too sensible: too practical for such folly."

"It's not like any rational woman. And Grace would have condoled with her! Women infect each other."

"What was the dream?"

"Some nonsense or other, you may be sure. I would not let her relate it, to me, or to Grace. Alice burst into tears and called me hard-hearted. I came out here to get away from her."

"For goodness' sake don't let her upset herself over a rubbishing dream, Tanerton," cried the Squire, all sympathy. "She's not strong, you know, just now. I dreamt one night the public hangman was appointed to take my head off; but it is on my shoulders yet. You tell her that."

"Yesterday was the day Jack was to sail," interrupted Tod.

"Of course it was," acquiesced the Rector: "he must be half-way down channel by this time. If—Here comes Alice!" he broke off. "I shall go. I don't want to hear more of such stuff."

He went on down the garden in a huff, disappearing behind the kidney-beans. Alice, wearing a light print gown and black silk apron, her smooth brown hair glossy as ever, and her open face as pretty, shook hands with them both.

"And what's this we hear about your tormenting yourself over a dream?" blundered the Squire. Though whether it was a blunder to say it, I know not; or whether, but for that, she would have spoken: once the ice is broken, you may plunge in easily. "My dear, I'd not have thought it of *you*."

Alice's face took a deeper gravity, her eyes a far-off look. "It is quite true, Mr. Todhetley," she sighed. "I have been very much troubled by a dream."

"Tell it us, Alice," said Tod, his whole face in a laugh. "What was it about?"

"That you may ridicule it?" she sighed.

"Yes," he answered. "Ridicule it out of you."

"You cannot do that," was her quiet answer: and Tod told me in later days that it rather took him aback to see her solemn sadness. "I should like to relate it to you, Mr. Todhetley. Herbert would not hear it, or let Grace."

"Herbert's a parson you know, my dear, and parsons think they ought to be above such things," was the Squire's soothing answer. "If it will ease your mind to tell it me—Here, let us sit down under the pear tree."

So they sat down on the bench under the blossoms of the pear tree, the Pater admonishing Tod to behave himself; and poor Alice told her dream.

"I thought it was the present time," she began. "This very present day, say, or yesterday; and that Jack was going to sea in command ——"

"But, my dear, he always goes in command."

"Of course. But in the dream the point was especially presented to my mind—that he was going out *in command*. He came to me the morning of the day he was to sail, looking very patient, pale, and sorrowful. It seemed that he and I had had some dispute, causing estrangement, the previous night: it was over then, and I, for one, repented of the coldness."

"Well, Alice?" broke in Tod: for she had stopped, and was gazing out straight before her.

"I wish I could show to you how *real* all this was," she resumed. "It was more as though I were wide awake, and enacting it. I never had so vivid a dream before; never in all my life."

"But why don't you go on?"

"Somebody had been murdered: some man. I don't know who it was—or where, or how. Jack was suspected. Jack! But it seemed that it could not be brought home to him. We were in a strange town; at least, it was strange to me, though it seemed that I had stayed in it once before, many years ago. Jack was standing before me all this while, you understand, in his sadness and sorrow. It was not he who had told me what had happened. I seemed to have known it already. Everybody knew it, everybody spoke of it, and we were in cruel distress. Suddenly I remembered that when I was in the town the previous time, the man who was murdered had had a bitter quarrel with another man, a gentleman: and a sort of revelation came over me that this gentleman had been the murderer. I went privately to some one who had authority in the ship, and said so; I think her owner. He laughed at me—did I know how high this gentleman was, he asked; the first magnate in the town. That he had done it I felt sure; surer than if I had seen it done; but no one would listen to me—and in the trouble I awoke."

"*That's* not much to be troubled at," cried the Squire.

"The trouble was terrible; you could not feel such in real life. But I have not told all. Presently I got to sleep again, and found

myself in the same dream. I was going through the streets of the town in an open carriage, the ship's owner with me ——"

"Was the ship the *Rose of Delhi?*"

"I don't know. The owner, sitting with me in the carriage, was not either of the owners of the *Rose of Delhi*, whom I know well; this was a stranger. We were going over a bridge. Walking towards us on the pavement, I saw two gentlemen arm-in-arm: one an officer in a dusky old red uniform and cocked-hat; the other an *evil*-looking man who wore a long brown coat. He walked along with his eyes on the ground. I knew him by intuition—that it was the man who had had the quarrel years before, and who had done the murder now. 'There's the gentleman you would have accused,' said my companion before I could speak, pointing to this man: 'he stands higher in position than anybody else in the town.' They walked on in their security, and we drove on in our pain. I ought to say in my pain, for I alone felt it. Oh, I cannot tell you what it was—this terrible pain; not felt so much, it seemed, because my husband could not be cleared, as for *his* sadness and sorrow. Nothing like it, I say, can ever be felt on earth."

"And what else, Alice?"

"That is all," she sighed. "I awoke for good then. But the pain and the fear remain with me."

"Perhaps, child, you are not very well?—been eating green gooseberries, or some such trash. Nothing's more likely to give one bad dreams than unripe fruit."

"Why should the dream have left this impression of evil upon me—this weight of fear?" cried Alice, never so much as hearing the Pater's irreverent suggestion. "If it meant nothing, if it were not come as a warning, it would pass from my mind as other dreams pass."

Not knowing what to say to this, the Squire said nothing. He and Tod both saw how useless it would be; no argument could shake her faith in the dream, and the impression it had left.

The Squire, more easily swayed than a child, yet suspecting nothing of the news that was on its way to Timberdale, quitted the rectory and went home shaking his head. Alice's solemn manner had told upon him. "I can't make much out of the dream, Joe," he remarked, as they walked back through the Ravine; "but I don't say dreams are always to be ridiculed, since we read of dreams sent as warnings in the Bible. Anyhow, I hope Jack will make a good voyage. He has got home safe and sound from other voyages: why should he not from this one?"

Before that day was over, they saw Alice again. She walked over to Crabb Cot in the evening with her little girl—a sprightly child with Jack's own honest and kindly eyes. Alice put a sealed paper into the Squire's hand.

"I know you will think me silly," she said to him, in a low tone

"perhaps gone a little out of my senses; but, as I told you this morning, nothing has ever impressed me so greatly and so unpleasantly as this dream. I cannot get it out of my mind for a moment; every hour, as it goes by, only serves to render it clearer. I have written it down here, every particular, more minutely than I related it to you this morning, and I have sealed it up, you see; and I am come to ask you to keep it. Should my husband ever be accused, it may serve to ——"

"Now, child, don't you talk nonsense," interrupted the Pater. "Accused of what?"

"I don't know. I wish I did. I hope you will pardon me, Mr. Todhetley," she went on, in deprecation; "but indeed there lies upon me a dread—an apprehension that startles me. I daresay I express myself badly; but it is there. And, do you know, Jack has lately experienced the same sensation; he told me so on Sunday. He said it was like an instinct of coming evil."

"Then that accounts for it," cried the Squire, considerably relieved, and wondering how Jack could be so silly, if she was. "If your husband told you that, Alice, of course the first thing you'd do would be to go and dream of it."

"Perhaps so. What he said made no impression on me; he laughed as he said it: I don't suppose it made much on him. Please keep the paper."

The Squire carried the paper upstairs and locked it up in the little old walnut bureau in his bedroom. He told Alice where he had put it. And she, declining any refreshment, left again with little Polly for Timberdale Rectory.

"Has Herbert come to?" asked Tod laughingly, as he went to open the gate for her.

"Oh, dear no," answered Alice. "He never will, if you mean as to hearing me tell the dream."

They had a hot argument after she left: Mrs. Todhetley maintaining that some dreams were to be regarded as sacred things; while Tod ridiculed them with all his might, asserting that there never had been, and never could be anything in them to affect sensible people. The Squire, now taking one side, now veering to the other, remained in a state of vacillation, something like Mahomet's coffin hovering between earth and Heaven.

And, you will now readily understand that when the following morning, Wednesday, Colonel Letsom brought the Squire the news of Pym's death, calling it murder, and that Jack was suspected, and the ship had gone out without him, this dream of Alice Tanerton's took a new and not at all an agreeable prominence. Even Tod, sceptical Tod, allowed that it was "queer."

On this same morning, Wednesday, Alice received a letter from her husband. He spoke of the mishap to the ship, said that she had put back, and had again gone out; he himself being detained in London

on business, but he expected to be off in a day or two and join her at some place down channel. But not a word did he say of the cause of his detention, or of the death of Edward Pym. She heard it from others.

With this confirmation, as it seemed, of her dream, Alice took it up more warmly. She went over to the old lawyer at Islip, John Paul, recounted the dream to him, and asked what she was to do. Naturally, old Paul told her "nothing": and he must have laughed in his sleeve as he said it.

III.

THE good ship, *Rose of Delhi*, finally went away with all her sails set for the East; but John Tanerton went not with her.

The inquest on the unfortunate young man, Pym, was put off from time to time, and prolonged and procrastinated. Captain Tanerton had to wait its pleasure; the ship could not.

The case presented difficulties, and the jury could not see their way to come to a verdict. Matters looked rather black against Captain Tanerton; that was not denied; but not sufficiently black, it would seem, for the law to lay hold of him. At any rate, the law did not. Perhaps the persistent advocacy of Sir Dace Fontaine went some way with the jury. Sir Dace gave it as his strong opinion that his misguided nephew, being the worse for drink, had fallen of himself, probably with his head on the iron fender, and that Captain Tanerton's denial was a strictly true one. The end finally arrived at was—that there was not sufficient evidence to show how the death was caused.

At the close of the investigation Jack went down to Timberdale. Not the open-hearted, ready-handed Jack of the old days, but a subdued, saddened man who seemed to have a care upon him. The foolish speech he had thoughtlessly made to Mr. Freeman preceded him: and Herbert Tanerton—always looking on the darkest side of everything and everybody, considered it a proof that Jack had done the deed.

Timberdale (including Crabb) held opposite opinions; half of it taking Captain Tanerton's side, half the contrary one. As to the Squire, he was more helpless than an old sheep. He had always liked Jack, had believed in him as in one of us: but, you see, when one gets into trouble, faith is apt to waver. A blow, argued the Pater in private, is so easily given in the heat of passion.

"A pretty kettle of fish this is," croaked Herbert to Jack, on his brother's arrival.

"Yes, it is," sighed Jack.

"The ship's gone without you, I hear."

"She had to go. Ships cannot be delayed to await the convenience of one man: you must know that, Herbert."

"How came you to do it, John?"

"To do what?" asked Jack. "To stay? It was no fault of mine. I was one of the chief witnesses, and the coroner would not release me."

"You know what I mean. Not that. How came you to do it, I ask?"

"To do what?" repeated Jack.

"Kill Pym."

Jack's face took a terrible shade of pain as he looked at his brother. "I should have thought, Herbert, that you, of all people, might have judged me better than that."

"I don't mean to say you did it deliberately; that you meant to do it," returned the Rector in his coldest manner. "But that was a very awkward threat of yours—that if the brokers persisted in sending Pym out with you, there'd be murder committed. Very incautious!"

"You can't mean what you say; you cannot surely reflect on what you would imply—that I spoke those words with intention!" flashed Jack.

"You did speak them—and they were verified," contended Herbert. Just the same thing, you see, that Mr. Freeman had said to Jack in London. Poor Jack!

"How did you hear that I had said anything of the kind?"

"Somebody wrote it to Timberdale," answered the parson, crustily. There could be no question that the affair had crossed him more than anything that had ever happened in this world. "I think it was Coralie Fontaine."

"I am deeply sorry I ever spoke them, Herbert—as things have turned out."

"No doubt you are. The tongue's an evil and dangerous member. Let us drop the subject: the less it is recurred to now, the better."

Captain Tanerton saw how it was—that all the world suspected him, beginning with his brother.

And he certainly did not do as much to combat the feeling as he might have done. This was noticed. He did not assert his innocence strenuously and earnestly. He said he was not guilty, it's true, but he said it too quietly. A man accused of so terrible a crime would move heaven and earth to prove the charge false—if false it were. Jack denied his guilt, but denied it in a very tame fashion. And this had its effect upon his upholders.

There could be no mistaking that some inward trouble tormented him. His warm, genial manners had given place to thoughtfulness and care. Was Jack guilty?—his best friends acknowledged the doubt now, in the depths of their heart. Herbert Tanerton was worrying himself into a chronic fever: chiefly because disgrace was reflected on his immaculate self, Jack being his brother. Squire Todhetley, meeting Jack one day in Robert Ashton's cornfield, took Jack's hands in his, and whispered that if Jack did strike the blow unwittingly, he knew it was all the fault of that unhappy, cross-

grained Pym. In short, the only person who retained full belief in Jack was his wife. Jack had surely done it, said Timberdale under the rose, but done it unintentionally.

Alice related her dream to Jack. Not being given to belief in dreams, Jack thought little of it. Nothing, in fact. It was no big, evil-faced man who harmed Pym, he answered, shaking his head; and he seemed to speak as one who knew.

Timberdale was no longer a pleasant resting-place for John Tanerton, and he quitted it for Liverpool, with Alice and their little girl. Aunt Dean received him coolly and distantly. The misfortune had put her out frightfully: with Jack's income threatened, there would be less for herself to prey upon. She told him to his face that if he wanted to correct Pym, he might have waited till they got out to sea: blows were not thought much of on board ship.

The next day Jack paid a visit to the owners, and resigned his command. For, he was still attached ostensibly to the *Rose of Delhi*, though another master had temporarily superseded him.

"Why do you do this?" asked Mr. Charles Freeman. "We can put you into another ship, one going on a shorter voyage, and when your own comes home you can take her again."

"No," said Jack. "Many thanks, though, for your confidence in me. All the world seems to believe me guilty. If I were guilty I am not fit to command a ship's crew."

"But you were not guilty?"

More emphatically than Jack had yet spoken upon the affair, he spoke now: and his truthful, candid eyes went straight into those of his questioner.

"*I was not.* Before Heaven, I say it."

Charles Freeman heaved a sigh of relief. He liked Jack, and the matter had somewhat troubled him.

"Then, Captain Tanerton—I fully believe you—why not reconsider your determination, and remain on active service? The *Shamrock* is going to Madras; sails in a day or two; and you shall have her. She'll be home again before the *Rose of Delhi*. For your own sake I think you should do this—to still rancorous tongues."

Jack sighed. "I can't feel free to go," he said. "This suspicion has troubled me more than you can imagine. I must get some employment on shore."

"You should stand up before the world and assert your innocence in this same emphatic manner," returned the owner. "Why have you not done it?"

Jack's voice took a tone of evasion at once. "I have not cared to do it."

Charles Freeman looked at him. A sudden thought flashed into his mind.

"Are you screening some one, Captain Tanerton?"

"How can you ask such a question?" rejoined Jack. But the

deep and sudden flush that rose with the words, gave fresh food for speculation to Mr. Freeman. He dropped his voice.

"Surely it was not Sir Dace Fontaine who—who killed him? The uncle and nephew were not on good terms."

Jack's face and voice brightened again—he could answer this with his whole heart. "No, no," he impressively said, "it was not Sir Dace Fontaine. You may at least rely upon that."

When I at length got back to Crabb, the Fontaines were there. After the inquest, they had gone again to Brighton. Poor Verena looked like a ghost, I thought, when I saw her on the Sunday in their pew at church.

"It has been a dreadful thing," I said to her, as we walked on together after service; "but I am sorry to see you look so ill."

"A dreadful thing!—ay, it has, Johnny Ludlow," was her answer, spoken in a wail. "I expect it will kill some of us."

Sir Dace looked ill too. His furtive eyes had glanced hither and thither during the service, like a man who has a scare upon him; but they seemed ever to come back to Verena.

Not another word was said by either of us until we were near the barn. Then Verena spoke.

"Where is John Tanerton?"

"In Liverpool, I hear."

"Poor fellow!"

Her tone was as piteous as her words, as her looks. All the bloom had gone from her pretty face; its lips were white, dry, and trembling. In Coralie there was no change; her smiles were pleasant as ever, her manners as easy. The calamity had evidently passed lightly over her; as I expect most things in life did pass.

Saying good-morning at the turning, Sir Dace and Verena branched off to Maythorn Bank. Coralie lingered yet, talking with Mr. Todhetley.

"My dear, how ill your father is looking!" exclaimed the Squire.

"He does look ill," answered Coralie. "He has never been quite the same since that night in London. He said one day that he could not get the sight of Pym out of his mind—as he saw him lying on the floor in Ship Street."

"It must have been a sad sight."

"Papa is also, I think, anxious about Verena," added Coralie. "She has taken the matter to heart in quite an unnecessary manner; just, I'm sure, as if she intended to die over it. That must vex papa: I see him glancing at her every minute in the day. Oh, I assure you I am the only cheerful one of the family now," concluded Coralie, lightly, as she ran away to catch the others.

That was the last we saw of them that year. On the morrow we left for Dyke Manor.

In the course of the autumn John Tanerton ran up to Timberdale

from Liverpool. It had come to his knowledge that the Ash Farm, belonging to Robert Ashton, was to let—Grace had chanced to mention it incidentally when writing to Alice—and poor Jack thought if he could only take it his fortune was made. He was an excellent, practical farmer, and knew he could make it answer. But it would take two or three thousand pounds to stock the Ash Farm, and Jack had not as many available shillings. He asked his brother to lend him the money.

"I always knew you were deficient in common sense," was the Rector's sarcastic rejoinder to the request. "Three thousand pounds! What next?"

"It would be quite safe, Herbert: you know how energetic I am. And I will pay you good interest."

"No doubt you will—when I lend it you. You have a cheek!"

"But ——"

"That will do; don't waste breath," interrupted Herbert, cutting him short. And he positively refused the request—refused to listen to another word.

Strolling past Maythorn Bank that same afternoon, very much down in looks and spirits, Jack saw Sir Dace Fontaine. He was leaning over his little gate, looking just as miserable as Jack. For Sir Dace to look out of sorts was nothing unusual; for Jack it was. Sir Dace asked what was amiss: and Jack—candid, free-spoken, open-natured Jack—told of his disappointment in regard to the Ash Farm: his brother not feeling inclined to advance him the necessary money to take it—£3,000.

"I wonder you do not return to the sea, Captain Tanerton," cried Sir Dace.

"I do not care to return to it," was Jack's answer.

"Why?"

"I shall never go to sea again, Sir Dace," he said in his candour.

"Never go to sea again!"

"No. At any rate, not until I am cleared. While this dark cloud of suspicion lies upon me I am not fit to take the command of others. Some windy night insubordinate men might throw the charge in my teeth."

"You are wrong," said Sir Dace, his countenance taking an angry turn. "You know, I presume, your own innocence—and you should act as if you knew it."

He turned back up the path without another word, entered his house, and shut the door. Jack walked slowly on. Presently he heard footsteps behind him, looked round, and saw Verena Fontaine. They had not met since the time of Pym's death, and Jack thought he had never seen such a change in anyone. Her bright colour was gone, her cheeks were wasted,—a kind of dumb despair sat in her once laughing blue eyes. All Jack's pity—and he had his share of it—went out to her.

"I heard a little of what you said to papa at the garden-gate, Captain Tanerton—not much of it. I was in the arbour. *Why* is it that you will not yet go to sea again? What is it you wait for?"

"I am waiting until I can stand clear in the eyes of men," answered Jack, candid as usual, but somewhat agitated, as if the topic were a sore one. "No man with a suspicion attaching to him should presume to hold authority over other men."

"I understand you," murmured Verena. "If you stood as free from suspicion with all the world as you are in my heart, and—and"—she paused from emotion—"and I think in my father's also, you would have no cause to hesitate."

Jack took a questioning glance at her; at the sad, eager eyes that were lifted beseechingly to his. "It is kind of you to say so much," he answered. "It struck me at the time of the occurrence that you could not, did not, believe me guilty."

Verena shivered. As if his steady gaze were too much for her, she turned her own aside towards the blue sky.

"Good-bye," she said faintly, putting out her hand. "I only wanted to say this—to let you know that I believe in your innocence."

"Thank you," said Jack, meeting her hand. "It is gratifying to hear that *you* do me justice."

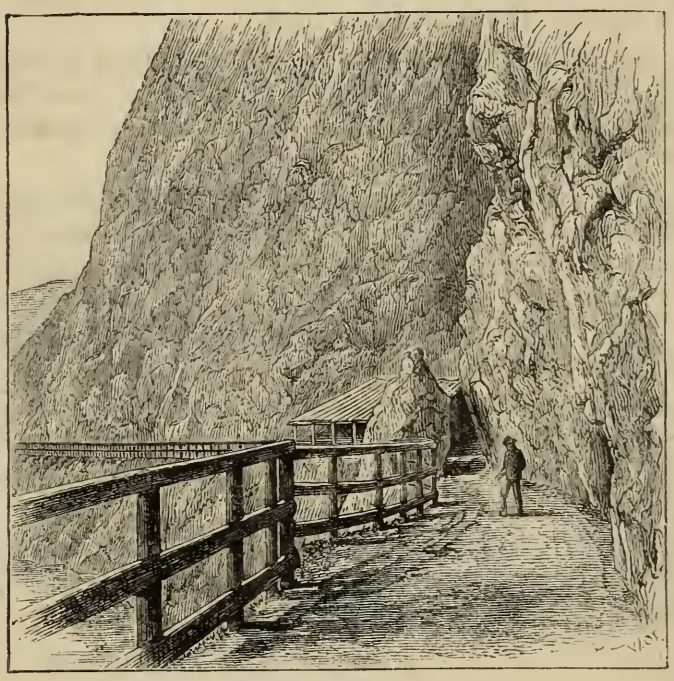
He walked quietly away. She stood still to watch him. And of all the distressed, sad, *aching* countenances ever seen in this world, few could have matched that of Miss Verena Fontaine.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

(*Concluded next month.*)

ABOUT NORWAY.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland."



Between Tune and Skogstad.

NORWAY may certainly be described as a very irregular country. Not, let us hasten to add, in the matter of its morals, which I believe are unexceptionable, but in its physical aspect. Long stretches of flat, level roads are almost unknown; and the great upheavals of Nature, which we call mountains, are well nigh as diversified in outline at their base as at their summit. The roads undulate; now in gentle lines which seem to serve no other purpose than to give the horse an excuse for crawling, and of which he makes the most—now suddenly rising in steep ascents which require both fortitude and perseverance to scale.

The reader will remember that we parted from Mr. and Miss B. at the foot of the Baegna Bridge: that after handshakes increased and multiplied on the part of Mr. B., who alighted from his carriole, and danced a species of war dance in the road, as he capered from one carriole to another, showering down upon us the while all kinds of good wishes for our future happiness and prosperity in Norway: and handwaves and kindly glances from his sister: the angle of the road at length took them from our sight, and we saw them no more.

We now began the ascent of a winding mountain path, steep and long—the ascent of the Jukamsklev. The road had been cleared out of the mountain in zigzags, and the scenery as we went upwards was of untold beauty. We obtained grand views of the rushing torrent, and as we mounted high and higher, our gaze seemed carried into precipitous depths. Not far from here is the church

of Lom, dating back to the thirteenth century, built of resinous pine wood in the Byzantine style, and tarred over from time to time until the wood has become hard as iron and almost imperishable. But we could not visit it, what had still to be done would admit of no delay on the road. As it was, the shadows were lengthening, and that peculiar look was creeping over the sky, which announces as surely as a sun-dial that the day is on the wane.

It was now my turn to receive the burden of leadership, and though perfectly helpless and innocent, I very soon felt myself quite a miserable culprit. Do what I would, my horse would not go beyond a snail's pace: he did not even walk, but crawled. In truth it was difficult to wish him to do anything more lively up this tremendous ascent. But hungry and weary—I cannot conclude a harrowing picture by adding footsore—it was no doubt exasperating to A., whose animal, with the perverseness of Norwegian horses, required as much holding in as mine did urging. Yet the affliction had to be endured. For my own part heroically, for at every turn fresh beauties disclosed themselves or old ones showed up in a new aspect. Pine-clad hills: a view more and more extended as we neared the summit: a rushing torrent below us, into which we could look as into a shuddering depth by simply leaning to the left and gazing breathlessly at the living, leaping torrent. To our right, trees clothed the mountain, and the eye could wander up into the depths of tangle and briar, the slanting shadows thrown by the sun, the gloom beyond, into which no sight could penetrate. Ahead of us we could see but a very short distance, so short and steep were the windings; so that the pleasures of hope—that every turn would prove the last—accompanied us on our way.

We gained the summit at last, and were rewarded by a magnificent view of mountain ranges, range upon range, snow hills in the distance, far as the eye could reach. Below, stretched the great valley, with its plains and villages, its lakes opening out, on which small islands and trees and ducks disported themselves. This Valley of Valders is one of the grandest and most extensive views in Norway, with its vast range, its far-away snow-capped mountains, its repose and solemn solitude. And now the mountain we had just ascended seemed literally to laugh at us, for no sooner had we gained the summit on the one side than we had to commence a descent upon the other. Down we went, by the same winding process—zigzag paths, cut and cleared out of the mountain. But if we had ascended deliberately, we came down at a speed which had in it a mixture of compensation, recklessness, and exhilaration, at once delightful and renovating. In the far distance we could just see the snow-mountains of Jotunheim, and passed on as quickly as possible to the next station, Frydenlund. This was ten and a half miles from the last station, Vold, and we had been very little short of three hours in accomplishing the distance.

Frydenlund seemed, by comparison, a very civilized and decent station; and we found that by waiting half an hour we could be served with quite a sumptuous repast—also by comparison. A lad belonging to the station, the son of the hostess, spoke just enough English to understand our requests—very humbly preferred on our part, for hunger as well as conscience makes cowards of us all. In a short time we found ourselves in Elysium, though not exactly revelling in nectar and ambrosia: and certainly not on Olympus, since we were in the valley.

Frydenlund is a somewhat important village, as villages go in Norway, possessing a whole staff of judicial dignitaries, including the Foged, or chief administrative official; the Sorenskriver, or local judge, and the Lensmand, the chief constable already alluded to, who pays periodical visits to the different stations in the district, inspects the way-books, and comes down upon all sorts of offenders with the strong arm of the law. The reader will not be surprised to hear, after this, that the district prison is not very far off. It is a large white building, so beautifully situated, so clean and orderly, that captivity within its walls should scarcely be looked upon as punishment.

The room in which our banquet was served was large, and, for a station, luxurious. Plants flourished in the windows and on the floor: great fuchsias and gorgeous geraniums, whose leaves threw out a subtle and delicious perfume. Excepting the wild flowers of the woods, our eyes had long been strangers to floral beauties of any sort, and these threw quite a glory into the room and turned it into a small paradise. A view fit for paradise, too, was that to be seen from the windows. The village in the plain; the long valley; the lakes studded with their small islands and waving trees; the opposite mountains, stretching away far as the eye could trace, down which ran great waterfalls; the deep clefts, where sight was lost in the blackness of night. All this we noted with delight, as soon as we had eyes and thoughts for the beautiful. For if, according to the French proverb, "Ventre affâmé n'a point d'oreilles," it is equally true that under the like conditions we can no more appreciate the beauties of nature than we can listen to the strains of music or the powers of oratory.

Yet contrary opinions have been expressed. I remember a lady once saying that she should like to live upon crystallized orange-blossoms (we were sitting down to supper, and some of the dainty confection was upon the table). The food was *so* poetical: anything less refined destroyed all that was æsthetical in one's nature. A gentleman opposite—whose name was then, and is now, in the first rank of poets—took up her remark, and said very openly and decidedly that he thought a good leg of mutton far more to the purpose, and for his part he preferred it. The lady opened her round eyes in affected horror, and then closed them in faintness, at such a want of the poetical in so unexpected a quarter; and she

whispered me that none of her family ever saw her eat: it was too vulgar: too gross and unspiritualizing: all *that* was done in the privacy of her own room.

This same lady, later in the evening, informed me that she thought the most delightful thing in the world must be to fly across the desert on the back of a dromedary—though why she preferred a dromedary to a camel, I did not stay to enquire. The feeling of unlimited space was *so* poetical—she was again among the poets—the sensation of fleeing from the vulgar herd of mankind was so soul-soaring in its influence! Here she landed me out of my depth; understanding collapsed, and only returned in time to see the lady disappearing from sight in a cloud: but when fully aroused to consciousness, I found the cloud was only of Shetland manufacture. And though Shetland may be the end of the earth, we have no reason whatever for supposing that it is the end nearest to heaven.

We had one more station to reach that night, and darkness was creeping on apace as we started on our last stage. We ascended the long hill and gradually rose far above the valley, which lay sleeping below us, with the village and the lakes and the islands. Across one of them a boat was darting, sculled by a boy, and so far off did it seem, and so tiny, that until we brought our glasses to bear upon it, we took it to be a swan sailing majestically away to its home. Everything was growing indistinct, and the far-off snow mountains were now invisible. Beside us the hills rose as far above the road to the right, as the valley was below us on the left. Cataracts here and there ran down the sides and could be heard "making music"—very lovely music it was—when they could no longer be seen, or only dimly traced in the gathering gloom, by a white, silvery thread, writhing and twisting like a thing of life, standing out in contrast with the gloomy blackness of the trees, and the dark surface of the mountains.

At about half-past ten at night, after twelve hours' almost incessant travelling, the post-boy with his peculiar twang—the sing-song tone of the Norwegians—cried out "Fagernaes!" a sound just then as welcome as June roses, and pointed to something ahead that could only be faintly discovered in the darkness. Sombre pine trees were about us, wrapped in the silence, and mystery of the hour. Out of these we issued, turned through a wide gate into an open space, the house loomed up before us, and in a few moments we were at anchor.

The landlord was at once at the door, and welcomed us hospitably. We found ourselves in a building that possessed quite the dignity of a small hotel; rough as regarded the staircase and sleeping rooms, but not without pretensions, and luxurious in comparison with our late experiences. The landlord, as he ushered us upstairs, informed us in very good English that we had the house to ourselves with the exception of three Dutchmen. Terrible exception, indeed,

though we knew it not then. You think at once, dear reader, that we were robbed or murdered by these Dutchmen, but you are wrong. They were only off before us the next morning, and during the remainder of that week were ahead of us on the road, taking up horses and carrioles, devouring everything before them like an army of locusts, and behaving to everyone they met with the greatest possible impoliteness. In the end they were voted a perfect nuisance by all, and a disgrace to their country.

If anyone wishes to know what it is to have a night of sound, refreshing sleep, let him take as a prescription twelve hours' carriole travelling in Norway. The remedy is unfailing.

At the breakfast table the next morning, the host informed us that the three Dutchmen had been gone about an hour, and we did not realize the importance of this apparently commonplace announcement. A pretty and quite refined-looking young woman waited upon us. I have never seen anyone who did this with such extraordinary quietness. She moved about with no more noise than a cat; until A. declared she gave him an uncanny, creepy feeling that was positively unpleasant. We were exercised in our minds as to whether she was the landlord's wife or sister, and came at last to the conclusion that she must be the former.

This house, once the station, is no longer so. The station, Fager*lund*, is a hundred yards further up the road, and also receives travellers: our inn was Fager*naes*. It is a favourite place of resort in summer, and is often full of visitors. Beautifully situated on the borders of the lake, our host informed us that it furnishes excellent trout fishing, and some wild-duck shooting. The surrounding views for many a long mile are charming, and for this alone a few days or a week might be pleasantly spent here. Small islands here, too, were dotted about the water, and willows hung gracefully and pensively over the banks. At Fagernaes, the rough and the wild in Norwegian scenery had given place to the sentimental and the refined.

The whole of that day's journey was a succession of beautiful scenes, varying in character, from the sublime and the severe to the quiet and unemotional. Now passing a wayside village or solitary cottage, out of which the dogs would spring barking with a furious noise that made us thankful that dogs are scarce in Norway: whilst the few villagers, the men with short jackets and gay waistcoats, and hats like sugar-cones, stopped their work to gaze after the wayfarers, with less curiosity no doubt than in days gone by. Now we passed through long avenues of trees, that shut out the broad sunlight, which threw slanting shadows athwart our path. Still the road undulated, like the long rollers of an Atlantic sea, and one could almost imagine that here the ocean had once found its home. To our left were the calm waters of the Strandefjord; but here and there the calmness was turned to a rushing torrent which leaped down many feet in white, seething foam, breaking over huge boulders, and

forcing its way through crevices in countless small cataracts, turning mill wheels, and giving work to men whose lives in these sublime scenes of nature should be inspired with a like grandeur of thought and sentiment. Only we know how familiarity with beauty at length takes from its influence: the eyes seem to be withheld: until an interruption or an absence restores the magic with the return.

Throughout the day grand mountains were about us. Now vast pine forests fringed the summits and stood out like some delicate fretwork of nature against the clear blue background; and now clear-cut outlines of more barren hills seemed to cut the sky sharply in twain. The first station we came to was Reien, against which we shall have a dark record in due time and place. Here we were in the neighbourhood of the Jotumheim, the highest mountains in Norway; and excursions lasting over a week may be made by those who love the excitement of danger, and are indifferent to fatigue.

Half-way between Reien and Stee, the next station, we passed, high up on the hill-side, a comfortable looking hotel, so beautifully situated, that the very sight of it has left a longing to go back some day, and spend a month there, exploring the lovely neighbourhood, seeking out the reindeer, and passing whole days in trout fishing or wild-duck shooting.

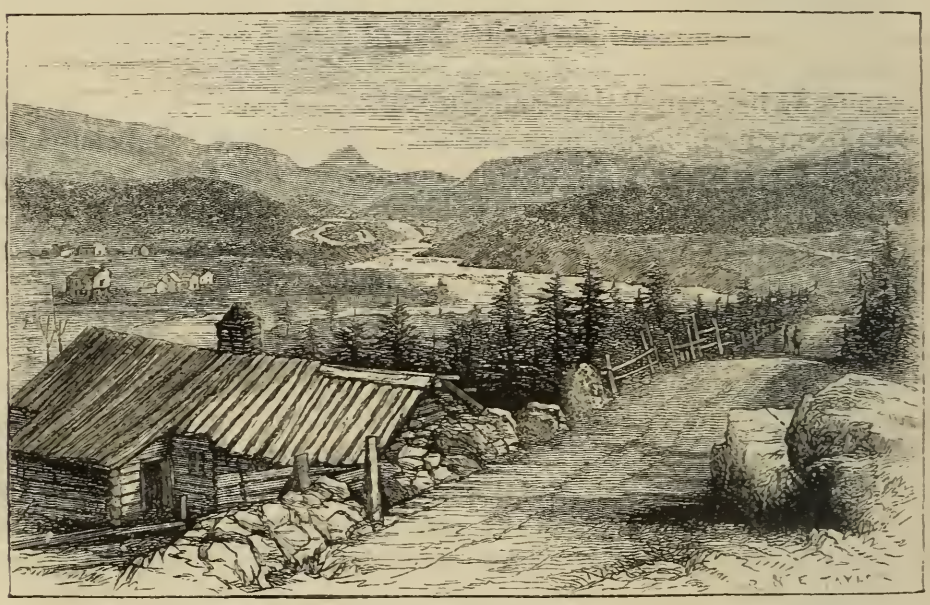
After Stee came Oilö, situated on the slope of the mountains. The fat, good-natured landlady came out and patted our horses, and lamented that we had driven them too fast. This was evidently her weak point, about which she had hallucinations. We had come at quite a solemn pace—by compulsion and not of preference—and the little horses were as fresh as when they started. They were not very first-rate to begin with, but even now not a hair was turned. In less than ten minutes we were off again from Oilö, but not before the good woman had affectionately hugged her cattle, and commended them to our care.

Much of the road between Oilö and the next station, Tune, was cut out of the solid rock, and bordered the lake, whose deep, dark waters looked cold and repelling; and every now and then a sharp angle in the road confronted us with a solid mass of rock, which concealed the way, and seemed to bar all further progress save a descent into the water. Occasionally we passed through short tunnels, blasted out of the solid stone, which suddenly transported us from the heat of the sun to a cold dripping atmosphere, from which we were glad to escape.

After a drive of about six miles through such scenery we reached Tune, a station celebrated all over Norway from the fact of its owner being a member of Parliament—and by no means a silent one either. We turned off the road up a steep narrow lane, all ruts and stones, and at a distance of some two hundred yards came to the house. Tune, himself, was away, perhaps looking after his parliamentary

duties, and the place seemed to be in charge of women folk. The first sight to greet us was a view of the three Dutchmen, who had taken possession of the whole room, chairs, tables and couches, but who departed five minutes after our entrance, having during that time behaved with as much indirect rudeness as could be condensed into the moments. They went off with the only available carrioles in the place, exulting aloud at the manner in which they had left those who would follow after to less good fortune than their own.

The serving woman, a good-looking, middle-aged maiden, was wonderfully attentive, pressed all kinds of good things upon us, was distressed that we did not make an end of everything, and charged us very moderately at the last. As a return for so much attention



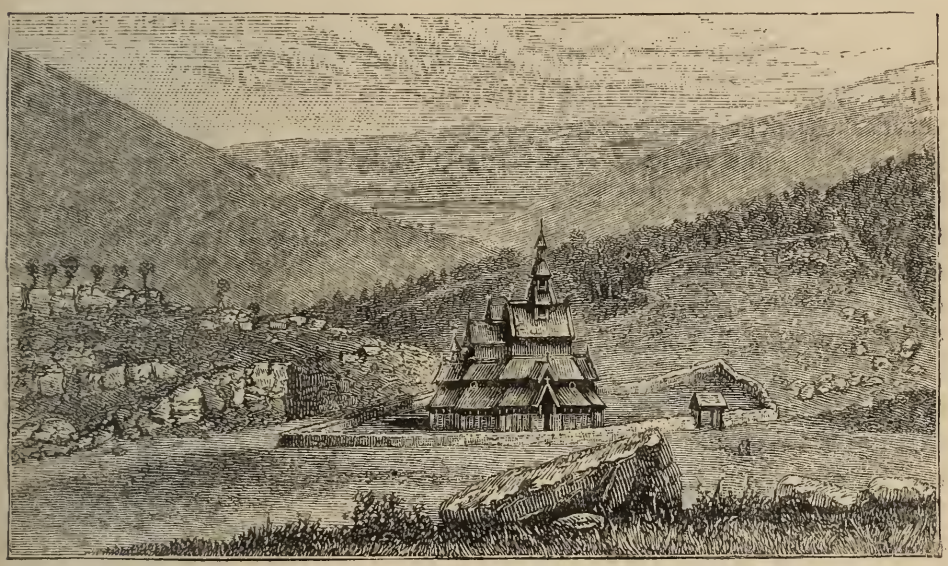
Near Fagernaes.

and friendly feeling, we offered her on our departure a gratuity which we thought only too small, but which she considered so out of proportion to her due, that in the humblest and most grateful manner she tendered us back a portion thereof. How many would possess this tender conscience in more civilized parts of the world?

Some weeks later on when we again visited the station, the woman recognised us in a moment, and greeted us quite as old friends. A beaming smile lit up her comely face; she rushed to the day-book, found our names all those weeks back, and pointed them out triumphantly. Then she turned to the Dutchmen's signatures, just above our own, and made a face and a gesture expressive of dislike and contempt. The landlord himself was at home this time; was very obliging, and pretended to be nothing more than he really was. At home, to his guests at any rate, he was evidently not the member

of Parliament, but simply the master of the station. He spoke English fairly well, and begged us to return later on in the year, and bring a party with us if possible, to shoot bears, which were a nuisance to the neighbourhood. Capital sport might be had, and he would do his best to make people comfortable. But this is dating forward.

As the carrioles were out, we each had to put up with a stolkjaer, to our sorrow, for the next stage was one of twelve miles. The road was yet wilder than that which had gone before. A wonderful piece of engineering skill, patience and labour, cut out of the solid rock, and skirting the edge of the lake. Again we occasionally passed through a tunnel, and here and there, where small cataracts ran down the mountain side, a long wooden shed was erected, to cover the



CHURCH OF BORGUND.

road and protect the traveller, and conduct the waterfall into the lake. But the drops filtered through, and these little diversions were so many shower-baths; refreshing, perhaps, but not agreeable.

In one place, I remember well, the road took a sharp turn to the left, the waters narrowed into a small channel, and on either side rose huge perpendicular mountains of rock, of towering height and frowning aspect, absolutely bare of the slightest verdure. Then, as the road turned, the lake opened out, basin-like, grand mountains developed themselves, and threw their shadows upon the dark, cruel-looking water. The effect of all this was heightened by the utter solitude of the whole district; the travelling mile after mile, hour after hour, in the midst of such grand scenes, yet never seeing a creature; the solitude unbroken even by the flight of a bird. Here, indeed, eagles might make their homes, unmolested by man, and wing their flight from peak to peak, as safe as in a desert land. The

road was narrow; so narrow in parts that the edge was bordered by railings of pine wood, strong and massive.

Soon after this, amidst the utmost grandeur of mountain height and solitude, we began to ascend. This we did for some distance, until at length we crossed a long wooden bridge to our right, and in a few moments found ourselves at Skogstad. Bennet had given us a stage further on for that day; but it was now late; the three Flying-Dutchmen were ahead with the horses, and the landlord said it would take some time to get others down from the hills: we, on our part, were glad of an excuse for cutting short our journey, and decided to remain there the night. The station is grandly situated in the midst of the gloomy yet beautiful mountains, the stream ever rushing past through the valley.

The civil landlord spoke excellent English, but raised our compassion and keenest sympathies. We presently heard, in the kitchen below, a shrew laying down the law, and elevating her voice with a harsh, grating sound, that penetrated to the very centre of one's nerves. If ever man was hen-pecked it must have been the unhappy lord and master of that voice—as it seemed to us. Let us hope we were mistaken; but though people sometimes say that black is white, they do not think it. It is difficult to disbelieve the evidence of one's senses. Solomon has said, the rod for the child: he is silent about the wife: and we would not for a moment have it supposed that we encourage such an idea, or offer it for universal consideration: but in this instance, had we found the man taming the shrew with the aid of a broomstick, I doubt if we should have died of grief or even blushed for shame. After all, the line must be drawn somewhere, and human sympathies have their limits.

Our host was tall, meek, and pale-faced, and what force of character he once possessed had evidently long since frightened itself away. Why will men for ever go on making these mistakes—the dove mating with the eagle, the wolf with the lamb, and other incongruities and incompatibilities too numerous to mention? Is it because, as Pope says, "Man never is, but always to be blest"? In such cases, however, does it not come to being something very near the opposite? We afterwards learned that this woman, when the fit took her, would do absolutely nothing for the comfort of the visitors.

The next morning for breakfast we succeeded in getting nothing better than black bread and bad coffee—no doubt because the woman had not recovered her amiability. Nevertheless we were glad to have stopped the night at Skogstad, and should do it again if ever we passed that way. In situation it is far more beautiful than Nystuen, the next station, and it possesses a new, good-sized, comfortable building which the enterprising landlord has erected for the accommodation of travellers.

So we started once more on our journey. The ascent to Nystuen was steep, continuous, and long. It was here that the ascent to the

Fille-Fjeld commenced. Vegetation became more and more barren and stunted the higher we climbed, the fir trees, of which we had had so many, giving place to the birch and mountain willow. We were nearly two hours and a half reaching Nystuen, a distance of about ten miles. This station lies between the hills, 3,300 feet above the level of the sea, and is so exposed to the storms and gales of winter that the buildings have had to be erected parallel with the sides of the valley: that is, with their gables from west to east, whence come the most violent hurricanes: otherwise they would never stand the fury of the elements.

The outlook from Nystuen is dreary and desolate, but the station is often full in summer. Snow hills were around us, and on the plain a small lake—the Utza Vand—celebrated for its trout, but cold, and dismal-looking. The ice, they told us, had only lately disappeared from the surface. Here we stayed only long enough to give our horses a rest: for the post-boy, who seemed to have taken a fancy to us, begged to accompany us further on our way. A little beyond this we came to the source of the Laera, and from this point it accompanied us to the end of our journey, swelling at times into a rushing mighty torrent, falling in huge cataracts, with a noise like the "sound of many waters," and again subsiding into a more tranquil mood, but always moving along with great speed.

From Nystuen we followed the level of the plateau for some time, and then a sharp, picturesque descent landed us at Maristuen. From here grand excursions can be made to the top of some of the mountains, by those who are interested in feats of this description: and from the height of one of them it has been said a hundred glaciers may be seen. Our next stage took us to Haeg, and 1,500 feet nearer the level of the sea. The descent wound about the mountains, which opened up in passes leading to other districts, through picturesque glens covered with wild flowers and lovely ferns: and near at hand, the whole time, the rushing, noisy torrent of the Laera. Vegetation grew more luxuriant and more beautiful. At Haeg we entered the Valley of the Laera, one of the most glorious in Norway. Between this station and Husum we came to the ancient church of Borgund, a fantastic edifice dating from the twelfth century, surmounted by dragons' heads, the timber black with age. Beyond stood an old belfry containing three bells, that are never rung for fear the whole concern should come down: and a lych gate was at each end of the churchyard. Tar as well as age has blackened the church, which was bought some time ago by the Antiquarian Society of Christiania. The interior and exterior of the church are most curious and interesting. A passage, like a small cloister, runs round the outside; the portal is elaborately ornamented with entwined snakes, and the key that opens the great door, with its Runic inscription, is as old and curious as the church itself.

Not less quaint is the interior, with its great wooden pillars, and curious old wood carving. Unhappily, a new church has been erected near to the old one. It is out of harmony with the old building, takes from its dignity and solitary state, and has destroyed some of

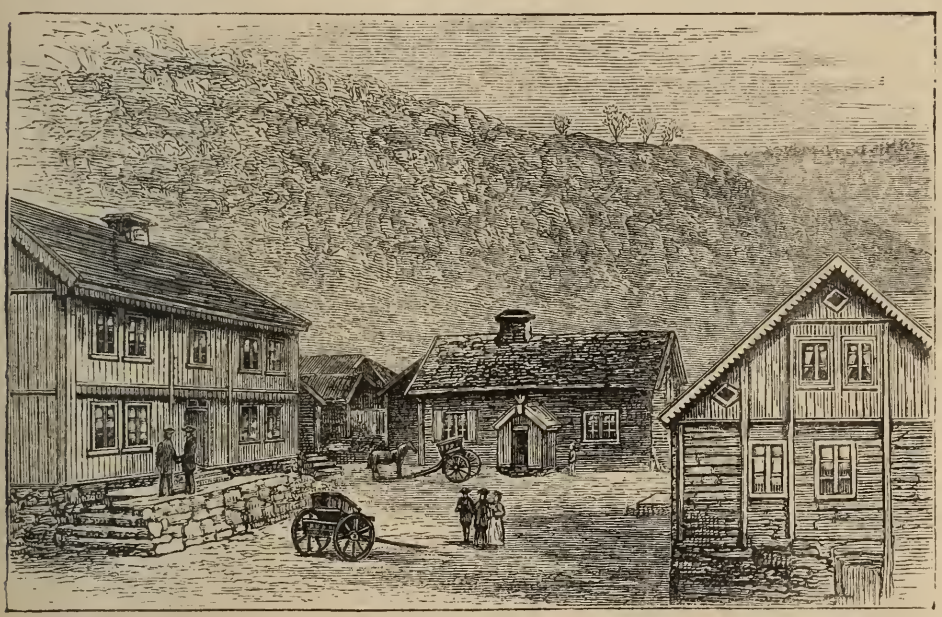
Near Husum.

the romance of one of the grandest, wildest, and loveliest spots in Norway.

Mountains in great masses fell away, opening up huge clefts and passes. Below the church, in a narrow defile between high rocks, rushed the river Laera, foaming, roaring, seething, with wild force,

defying all obstacles in its turbulent path. The old road led over the steep hills to the right, and this we had to follow, for there had been a landslip on the new road, and for the present it was impassable. The ravine leading beside the new road is sublime, w ld, and grand to the last extremity, but it was not then that we saw it.

Passing the church, we ascended the steep hill, wound round, and once more descending into the valley, found ourselves at Husum. We had not changed horses or carrioles since leaving Skogstad, six hours ago, and thus had lost very little time on the road: and the horses seemed as fresh at the end as at the beginning of the journey. Our post-boy was a little, strong, well-made mountaineer, about



Husum.

twenty years of age, full of fire, and energy, and muscular development, who scrambled up the mountain sides like a cat after the wild flowers, laughed and talked incessantly, displayed his small stock of English, and made himself understood somehow. He was a fair, Saxon-looking man, and, dressed in his short blue jacket, knee-breeches, and brigand hat, seemed to harmonize well with the scenery. Towards the end he took up the guide-book, and with a familiarity in which there was nothing displeasing—so unconscious was it, so simple and frank was the fellow, so fresh, open, and genuine his ruddy face and clear, wide-open blue eyes—he pitched upon the vocabulary and phrases at the end, and reading the Norwegian in a clear, fluent voice, with great perseverance caught up the accent of the English equivalents, which he learnt off by heart as they were repeated to him. But at Husum he declared that he must go no further; so we settled our money matters, and, according to the

universal system in Norway, he gave us a hand-grasp that would have done honour to Hercules himself. I can yet feel the honest fellow's expression of good-fellowship. We made him happy with what, to him, was a good dinner, over and above his "drikke penge," and as we had now to wait, whether we would or no, ordered some refreshment for ourselves.

Husum is almost more grandly situated than any other station between Sörum and Laerdal. The defile is somewhat narrow, and the stream rushes through the valley with tremendous speed, thundering over its rocky bed, foaming over great boulders, and seeming to reduce all obstacles in the course of time. Immediately in front of the station it has a fall of many feet: an immense volume of water, white, frothy, seething foam, tumbling into a perfect whirlpool of rage and fury; boiling, rushing, hurling itself over at express speed and with terrible strength; casting around showers of spray, and ascending in white steamy mist. The noise was so tremendous, that when close upon it we could not hear ourselves speak. But to go to the very edge, to sit down upon the rocks, and look over and into this mass of rushing waters, to watch the power of this inexhaustible torrent, was to lay oneself under the influence of a sublime emotion. The rocks here contracted into a very narrow opening, so that the strength and speed of the rushing torrent found itself concentrated into tenfold power.

It was indeed a glorious spot. Surrounding us on all sides were the mountains: bare rocks to the very summit, cut and jagged, lined and wrinkled, as if with the burden of all the ages. Others clothed with furze and pine trees, with sprinklings of ferns and wild flowers: mountains opposing each other, and trees whispering their secrets, as in centuries past, when the waters were rushing onwards to the sea just as they were to-day: and as they will be when we in turn shall have given place to a generation of men and women who will know greater secrets than we do, and make grander discoveries.

At length we started on our way to Blaaflaten (pronounced Bloflaten: the double *aa* in Norwegian is pronounced like *o*). The grandeur of the pass was undiminished, the road being often cut out of the rock and overhanging the rushing torrent, with nothing but the pine fences to protect the traveller. Then all this rugged and sublime scene passed away in a rapid descent that landed us in a broad valley, luxuriant and fertile in aspect, compared with that which had gone before.

After Blaaflaten we entered upon our last stage. I was not sorry to see the end of our journey at hand. Twelve or fourteen hours a day had proved almost too much of a good thing; and yet I think we were less tired now than at the end of our first day's work. The novel mode of travelling; the ever-beautiful scenery; the fresh, sparkling air: the restful if somewhat monotonous solitude—all tended to keep up excitement and interest; whilst a well-earned,

sound rest each night went far to restore the flagging energies of the previous day.

Soon after leaving Blaaflaten we came by the mountain side upon the first wild-rose bush I had seen for many a long day: a sight to bring a rush of home memories to the mind, and conjure up, as if by magic, scenes long gone by. Memories of early days and hours that are the happiest in life if we only knew it, and come not twice to any man: memories veiled by the sober realities of after life, until a flower, a scent, a song, a chime, it may be a page in an old book, or a letter, yellow with age, traced by a well-loved hand, suddenly draws aside the curtain with unsparing haste, and brings back the past with an emotion that is at once the keenest pleasure and pain. The remembrance of days when sorrow and regrets are unknown: when life is not disillusioned, and robbed of that charm—an unknown future. When its aspirations and rose-coloured dreams, that fade so soon never to return, are still things of sense and touch: when the lesson has yet to be learnt that man's heritage is care, and his best happiness must lie in earnest work.

It took but a moment to stop the carriole and gather some of the blossoms, that were full of the homely scent of the dog-roses in our own country lanes. At once an invisible link stretched across the great space dividing the two nations, and brought them for the moment into tender harmony with each other.

But we have not time to moralise now, as we had not then to linger. The mountains fell away, the valley widened, the stream expanded; and about ten o'clock at night we reached Laerdalsoren, and with it the end of our journey.

Yet our rest would only be for the night. Early the next morning we were to take a boat with three strong rowers, and cross a portion of the Sogne Fjord to Aurdal, on our road to the Vettisfos. An excursion of too much interest and importance to be introduced at the end of a paper.

BETWEEN TWO STOOLS.

By Charles Hervey.

THE Honourable Adolphus Sharpset was in what is popularly called a "fix," and he knew it. His financial position might almost have been compared to that of Mr. Richard Swiveller, when he entered in his little book the names of the streets he disliked, for particular reasons, going down while the shops were open. It was, in fact, as he himself described it in his own flowery language, "a prospective case of whitewash."

Things had been going unkindly with him for some time, but the climax was evidently approaching. His slender allowance as a younger son of Lord Scantiland, himself a needy and embarrassed peer, was forestalled with infinitely more regularity than it was paid; his "paper" was hopelessly unnegotiable, and the list of his debts rivalled in length at least the famous catalogue of Leporello. As, however, he fully recognised the principle laid down by the lamented Brummell respecting the folly of "muddling away one's fortune in paying tradesmen's bills," this latter responsibility troubled him very little. Provided that he could contrive to keep afloat at the Caravansary—a sort of nondescript club, familiarly designated by its members the "Refuge"—and indulge in occasionally backing his fancy for the Cambridgeshire or City and Suburban, his conscience was tolerably easy.

As yet he had managed, by dint of an insinuating address and, when it suited his purpose, an assumption of extreme affability, to weaken the storm, but people were becoming more and more sceptical touching the marketable value of his promises. His landlady in Bury Street had already let fall sundry broad hints that a settlement for the current half year would be highly convenient to her; and even his tailor, formerly the most obsequious and accommodating of Schneiders, had peremptorily declined any further dealings with so unprofitable a customer.

"So you see, old fellow," remarked the Honourable Adolphus in the smoking-room of the Caravansary, to his equally impecunious friend, Frank Lascelles, after a brief exposé of the melancholy state of affairs, "things are about as fishy as they can be; and if Brother to Merrylegs doesn't pull off the handicap, there's no help for it—I must go in for the widow."

"You might do worse," replied Frank. "Three thousand a-year at her own disposal, besides the house in Wimpole Street and the best cook for curry in all London! Might be a trifle younger, certainly, but one can't have everything. And mark my words, Dolly, if you don't make strong running, the Major will."

"Confound the Major!"

"With all my heart, but keep an eye on him. The cad wasn't born yesterday, and is as hard up as either of us. He has been unlucky at whist lately, and dropped a good bit of money on the Leger; so depend upon it, if he has a chance of recouping himself by marrying the widow, he won't let it slip."

"He might have her to-morrow, and welcome," said the Honourable Adolphus, "if I could only be sure of landing the sixty-six fifties; not an impossible contingency by any means, if the horse is half the flyer they seem to think in the stable. He's going up in the market like a rocket, and if I chose to hedge ——"

"Why don't you?"

"Simply because a few hundreds won't put me straight, and a few thousands will; so I've no choice in the matter, and must stand the shot. However, it's as well to have two strings to one's bow, so I'll take your advice about the Mangoe, if only for the pleasure of giving our friend the Major the go-by. By the way, we shall meet him at dinner there to-day, and you'll have an opportunity of carrying on with that stunning girl, Alice Carruthers. Pity, for your sake, that she and the old lady can't change places: a waiting game is hard lines in the long run."

"Especially when there is nothing to wait for," assented Lascelles in a despondent tone. "A poor devil of a barrister, without a brief or the hope of one, and a portionless orphan with a pretty face, pour tout potage; the prospect isn't over lively."

"Something may turn up yet," encouragingly observed his companion. "That fellow Micawber found it all right in the end, you know."

"And all wrong in the beginning," retorted Frank. "I fancy the resemblance between us is likely to stop there."

Wimpole Street is not precisely a locality calculated to impress the passing stranger with any exaggerated idea of the cheerfulness of its population. It is eminently respectable and dingily uniform; and, due allowance made for the difference of architecture, instinctively suggests a vague reminiscence of the street of tombs at Pompeii. Like other parallel thoroughfares in its immediate vicinity, it presents on either side an unbroken vista of orthodox family dwellings, the sole indication relative to the social status of their occupants being an occasional highly polished brass plate attached to the door, and decorated with the name of some medical or surgical practitioner; or, at still rarer intervals, a manuscript advertisement of "Apartments to Let."

The house inhabited by Mrs. Mangoe, viewed externally, differed in no essential respect from those of her neighbours, and had evidently been constructed after the same pattern; but the interior, furnished with every attention to comfort and luxurious elegance, was peculiarly

characteristic of its owner. Indian mattings of the finest texture, the softest Turkey carpets, and the most delicately woven Persian hangings gave a semi-oriental air to the lofty but somewhat narrowly proportioned rooms, while the stiff-backed chairs and slippery chintz-covered sofas, still religiously adhered to by certain indigenous notabilities of the quarter, had been advantageously replaced by the latest and most artistic inventions of Parisian upholstery. One of the rooms had been fitted up as a boudoir, and here the widow sat, awaiting the arrival of her guests, and watching the movements of a young and graceful girl engaged in selecting a bouquet of flowers and ferns from an adjoining miniature conservatory.

The relict of the deceased Mangoe—in his day one of the ablest and shrewdest judicial functionaries of Calcutta—was a short, stout and middle-aged dame, with small keen eyes and a cheery, good-humoured face; her grey silk dress was richly trimmed with black lace, and a liberal moiety of her plump little arms was literally covered with bracelets and bangles. Her companion, on the contrary, was indebted for her attractive appearance neither to milliner nor jeweller; she was simply but becomingly attired in white muslin, without any other ornament than a single gloire de Dijon artistically entwined among the folds of her luxuriant chestnut hair.

Alice Carruthers, however, needed no extraneous adjunct to the charm of her nineteen years and exquisitely feminine beauty. She was tall and slightly formed, with soft blue eyes and a complexion as delicate as a thé rose, and it would be difficult to imagine a prettier picture than her slender and elegant figure bending over the freshly gathered store of bud and blossom—"herself a fairer flower." Presently, her task accomplished, she re-entered the boudoir, and tastefully grouped her fragrant spoils in a china vase, glancing every now and then at the widow, as if to solicit her approval.

"When you have finished, child," said Mrs. Mangoe, "sit down by me. I have something to say before the people come. There, that low chair will do. Now, tell me truly, is there anything between you and Frank Lascelles?"

At this point-blank question Miss Carruthers blushed, and, after a momentary pause of embarrassment, stammered out: "I think he likes me, but ——"

"Is afraid to say so, because he is too poor to marry," interrupted the widow. "Am I not right?"

Alice nodded affirmatively.

"I thought so, and I needn't ask your ideas on the subject, for your cheeks have told the tale already. Well, when I have had a talk with the young man about ways and means, we shall see; he is not a fortune-hunter, at any rate, and that's more than can be said of certain gentlemen of our acquaintance. No, no, my Alice shall be chosen for her own pretty self or not at all, and must play her part of dependent on an old woman's bounty a little longer. But hush!

I hear footsteps on the stairs. Take your embroidery, child, and sit where you usually do."

Miss Carruthers had scarcely time to rise from her chair, and retire to a more respectful distance from her protectress, before an irreproachably white-cravated butler, appearing at the door, announced in a sonorous tone,

"Major de Mogyns!"

The new-comer, a middle-sized individual, with stiff black hair, suspiciously bordering on purple, and a carefully waxed moustache, entered the room as jauntily as a decided tendency to obesity would permit, and advanced towards the widow with an air of great empressement, vouchsafing only a distant and somewhat cavalier bow to her fair companion. While he is inquiring in accents of the tenderest solicitude after the health of "dear Mrs. Mangoe," and installing himself in a comfortable arm-chair by her side, it may not be inopportune to enlighten the reader respecting the social position of the gallant warrior, and explain by what means he had contrived to obtain admittance on so apparently intimate a footing to No. 200A, Wimpole Street.

Major de Mogyns, then, or, as he was habitually styled at the Caravansary, "the Major," possibly because no other of its members possessed any claim to a similar distinctive title, had borne during the earlier part of his career the less euphonious but more legitimate name of Muggins, which he subsequently discarded together with all reminiscences of an obscure parentage, and of a family still vegetating in the dingy atmosphere of a small manufacturing town. Whence he derived his military grade, or to what regiment he had belonged, no one precisely knew, his allusions to such topics being of the vaguest; but it was generally supposed, from his evident familiarity with life in India, that he had been at some time or other attached to a native corps. He had become acquainted with the husband of his hostess in Calcutta, and afterwards renewed his intercourse with him at Cheltenham, a favourite resort of the retired civilian. It was there that the latter first met the Honourable Adolphus, during a flying trip of the sporting patrician to Gloucestershire on the occasion of a steeple-chase, where he himself was among the competitors; and it may parenthetically be added, disappointed his backers by an untimely "cropper" at the second fence.

Since the death of Mr. Mangoe, the Major had continued to cultivate the society of his widow, and from the period of her installation in London seldom allowed many days to elapse without finding his way to Wimpole Street, and neglected no opportunity of assuming the rights and privileges of "l'ami de la maison." Sharpset's visits, on the contrary, were few and far between; but when he did appear, his respectful devotion to the lady of the house was gall and wormwood to his military rival, who hated him cordially, and sought by every means in his power to disparage

him in the eyes of her whom he already looked upon as the future Mrs. de Mogyns. What the widow's private opinion as to the likelihood of that event may have been we can only conjecture, for she prudently kept it to herself; but it is certain that the Major, with or without reason, chose to consider himself a favoured suitor, and was in the best of spirits accordingly.

He was still complacently occupied in "making running," when a ring at the hall door heralded the approach of the two remaining guests; a few minutes later the party descended to the dining-room, the Honourable Adolphus naturally pairing off with Mrs. Mangoe, and de Mogyns offering his arm with an air of sublime protection to Alice, while Frank Lascelles, inwardly chafing, followed partnerless in the rear. Thanks, however, to the friendly sociability of a round table, he found himself seated beside the object of his affections, and was consequently in the seventh heaven; but although she blushed very much when spoken to, she nevertheless studiously avoided responding otherwise than by monosyllables to his attempts at conversation. Sharpset was in high force, and discoursed incessantly on current and fashionable topics, to the infinite disgust of the Major, who, unable to get in more than a word here and there, and disdaining to waste his eloquence on so unremunerative an auditor as Miss Carruthers, fidgeted sulkily in his chair, and drank more champagne than was good for him. When the ladies had retired, and the claret had made its circuit, he thawed a little, and condescended to ask what were the latest odds on the coming handicap.

"Five to one on the field," replied the Honourable Adolphus. "Fifteen against Brother to Merrylegs."

"Ah!" said de Mogyns drily. "You've backed him, I hear?"

"Rather!"

The Major filled his glass, and looked oracular. "Oh," said he again, "he won't win. Halford's mare can give him six pounds, and beat him in a walk."

"What, Dulcibella! Not if he knows it," retorted Sharpset. "She was a length and a half behind him in the Chester Cup."

A long discussion ensued respecting the comparative merits and performances of the animal in question, during which Frank, who had metal more attractive upstairs, slipped quietly out of the room, leaving the two worthies tête-à-tête. When they at length made their appearance, both the widow and Lascelles seemed preoccupied, and indisposed to talk; while Alice, bending over her embroidery frame, played propriety in a corner. Contrary, therefore, to the usual habits of the house, the party broke up early, and the trio strolled together as far as the Caravansary, where the Major, who was longing for his rubber, at once adjourned to the card room.

"What on earth has come to you to-night, Frank?" inquired the Honourable Adolphus, when he and his friend were alone. "You

gave us the slip at dessert, and have hardly spoken a word since. If that is the result of passing an evening with one's lady-love, courtship must be an uncommonly uphill game. Isn't Miss Barkis willing?"

"I wasn't thinking about her," replied Lascelles, "but about what happened before you came upstairs. I had to undergo a regular cross-examination concerning the state of my finances and my prospects at the bar, and I will say that for our amiable hostess, Ballantine couldn't have done it better. She turned me inside out like a glove."

"Put you through your paces, eh?" said Sharpset.

"Exactly, and the worst of it was, I fancied that Alice enjoyed my embarrassment, though she tried hard to prevent my seeing it. Altogether, I felt extremely uncomfortable."

"Like our friend the Major at dinner," remarked his companion, chuckling at the recollection. "I think I managed to put a spoke in his wheel to-night. He won't find it a walk over, I'll answer for that."

"Then you really intend going in for the widow?"

"Most decidedly. It's a safer spec than Brother to Merrylegs."

"I don't know about that," said the barrister doubtfully. "From what I have seen of her this evening, if I had the choice, I would rather depend on the horse!"

The Honourable Adolphus was not a man to let the grass grow under his feet; whatever he made up his mind to do, he did quickly and thoroughly, or, according to his own particular phraseology, "came with a rush." This natural impulse to take time by the forelock was strengthened in the present instance by two additional incentives to exertion, namely, the desire to cut out de Mogyns, and, what was still more important under the circumstances, the deplorable condition of his finances. It now only wanted a week to the race, and if by that period he had not succeeded in one or the other of his projects, he was, as he himself expressed it, a "gone coon."

Determined, therefore, to prosecute the siege with vigour, he rarely let an afternoon go by without a pilgrimage to Wimpole Street, but at whatever hour he happened to arrive, he invariably found the Major there before him; and though on every occasion he prolonged his visit to an unconscionable length, never by any chance was he even for a moment alone with the widow. The conversation being thus limited to generalities, neither party had an opportunity of ascertaining who held the first place in the lady's good graces; and as she carefully abstained from showing the slightest preference for either, and accepted their complimentary tributes to her looks and dress as a mere matter of course, they can hardly be said to have gained much by their chivalrous devotion.

This unpromising state of things continued until the day preceding that on which the handicap was to be decided, when Frank, who had

employed the interval since his last meeting with Alice in heroic but ineffectual efforts to impress the attorneys of his acquaintance with a favourable idea of his forensic abilities, received the following note :

"Wimpole Street, Monday.

"DEAR MR. LASCELLES,—Could you possibly oblige me with a call early to-morrow morning? I wish to consult you on a little matter of business.—Sincerely yours,

"EMILY MANGOE."

"What can this mean?" he thought. "Why should she apply to me of all people in the world—unless, indeed," as an idea struck him, "she wants to pump me about Dolly! I had better look him up at any rate, and ascertain how the land lies before I go; for if she *does* intend to marry him—which I don't believe—I shall be in the witness-box again for a certainty!"

Late on the same afternoon he found his friend, as he had anticipated, in the smoking-room of the club, highly elated at the steady advance in the betting of Brother to Merrylegs, who, his backer exultingly declared, was now nearly as good a favourite as anything in the race. When Lascelles informed him of his summons to Wimpole Street, Sharpset emphatically affirmed that nothing could be more satisfactorily conclusive. "Don't you see her drift?" he argued; "she can't say 'yes' before she's asked, so she lets me know in a roundabout way that the sooner I *do* ask her the better. I'll look in there to-morrow before the telegrams come, and strike while the iron's hot. I tell you candidly, old fellow, I shouldn't be in the least surprised if I landed the double event."

"*I* should," thought Frank, as the friends separated.

Soon after eleven on the following morning the young lawyer was ushered into the widow's boudoir; she was alone, and received him with her usual cordiality, but with a gravity of manner by no means habitual to her. "I was anxious to see you, Mr. Lascelles," she began, "for I have to ask your opinion on a subject which, if I do not mistake, interests us both. Sit down here," she added, pointing to a chair beside her, "and let me tell my story my own way, as clearly and as briefly as I can."

Frank bowed and obeyed her, wondering what was coming next.

"Since my arrival in England from India," she continued, "an old friend, to whom my husband from motives of gratitude was sincerely attached, died in Calcutta, partly from grief at the loss of his wife, partly from a sudden reverse of fortune, which had reduced him from a state of affluence to absolute poverty. He left one daughter, who had been for some years, on account of delicate health, under the charge of an aunt in Devonshire, the widow of an officer, and in receipt of a small annual pension. She also died a

few months ago, and I immediately sent for the young girl—you will already have guessed that I am speaking of Alice Carruthers—and installed her here as my companion. You are wondering, no doubt, why I am telling you this, but I have as good eyes as most people, and have noticed the direction of *yours* pretty accurately whenever you have been here. I am perfectly aware that the circumstances you alluded to the other evening have alone prevented you from asking my protégée to be your wife, and as I have an idea that she is not altogether disinclined to listen favourably to such a proposal on your part, I intend helping you as far as I can. My adopted daughter—you have never heard of her, but you will see her here some day—will of course inherit the bulk of my property, but when Alice marries, three hundred a-year will be settled on her; it is not much to begin housekeeping upon, but your own exertions must supply the rest. What do you say?"

"What can I say," cried Frank, radiant with delight, "but that you are the best and kindest of women, and I the happiest of men!"

"Not quite so fast," interrupted Mrs. Mangoe, with a smile, "there is another person to be consulted, and I will send her to you that you may plead your cause yourself. I expect Major de Mogyns this morning," she added, with a merry twinkle of her eye, and as I have not hitherto mentioned the existence of my adopted daughter either to him or your friend Mr. Sharpset, I think it as well for several reasons that I should do so to-day. Perhaps you understand why!" and without waiting for an answer, she left the boudoir. Shortly after, Alice made her wished-for appearance, and exactly at the same moment the Major, gorgeously attired, and with an air of supreme self-confidence, entered the drawing-room, where the widow was ready to receive him.

Of the interview between the lovers we need merely say that it was very long and perfectly satisfactory, and only abridged by a summons to the luncheon table. They found Mrs. Mangoe endeavouring to check an uncontrollable inclination to laugh.

"I really ought to be ashamed of myself," she said, "but I can't help it, the man's face was too ridiculous. He had a new coat on, with a flower in his button-hole, and his whiskers were fresh dyed for the occasion: quite the bridegroom as he evidently thought, and was so terribly impatient to come to the point, I suppose for fear of interruption, that he stammered out his phrases like a school-boy. However, their meaning was clear enough, so I cut him short without any ceremony by a flat refusal. At first, he seemed as if he couldn't believe his ears, and looked so utterly woe-begone that I had pity on him, told him plainly that it would be his own fault if we did not remain good friends, and asked him to dinner next week. Just as he was going away, Warner brought him a telegram which had been sent on from his club; he asked my permission to open it, turned very pale, and muttering something I could not understand about

scratching a mare, took leave of me abruptly, and hurried away. What did he mean, Mr. Lascelles?"

"That he has the same ill luck at Newmarket as in Wimpole Street, I fancy," replied Frank. "He expected to win a large stake to-day by backing a mare called Dulcibella, and from what you say she must have been struck out of the race. I have no particular liking for the Major, but I have been so fortunate myself that I am almost sorry for him."

"More fortunate perhaps than you imagine," said the widow. "Don't you think, Alice, we may tell him all?"

"I think we may," replied Miss Carruthers, glancing slily at her betrothed.

"Well then, Frank—I shall call you so in future, mind—I must say that whatever your faults may be, and I'll warrant you have plenty, curiosity is not one of them."

"How so, my dear madam?" inquired the barrister.

"My good sir, if you had been a woman, and had heard me speak of an adopted daughter, of whose existence you had not the remotest idea, you would never have rested until you had found out who she was, and all about her."

"Ah, yes, I remember," said Lascelles, "but I am afraid that I hardly listened to what you were saying. I was thinking ——"

"Of somebody else! Very natural perhaps, but not over polite. However, when you see her, you will own that she is a charming girl."

"No doubt," said Frank, feeling that he was expected to say something.

"A sweet pretty creature," continued the widow, "with the softest blue eyes and the loveliest fair hair imaginable, and a complexion like alabaster."

"But, my dear Mrs. Mangoe," laughingly observed the young man, "if you were talking of Alice, you could not have described her more exactly."

"And of whom but Alice do you suppose I am talking?" retorted the lady. "Is she not my adopted daughter, and have you only just found it out, you silly fellow?"

Before Frank could answer, the door opened, and the butler, his face redder than usual, for he had been disturbed at his dinner, announced that Mr. Sharpset was in the drawing-room.

"Bless me!" exclaimed the widow, rising hastily from her chair, "I had quite forgotten he was coming. Alice must tell you the rest. If it's the old story over again," she said to herself as she went up stairs, "I shall have easier work with him than with the Major!"

She was apparently right in her previsions, for in less than a quarter of an hour the Honourable Adolphus, closing the street door with a tremendous bang, jumped into a Hansom which was in waiting, and bade the driver "bowl away like bricks" to the Caravansary.

"Floored!" he muttered as he lit a cigar, "regularly up a tree! Frank was right in recommending me to trust to the horse. It's my only chance now. Might as well have been on the course after all—wish I had! Half-past three, by Jove!" he added, consulting his watch, "the news must have arrived by this time. Push along, cabby!"

"Cabby" was equal to the occasion, and a few minutes later landed his fare at the club door. There stood the Major, smoking his cheroot, his eyes twinkling maliciously as he recognised the new comer.

"Who's won?" shouted the Honourable Adolphus, darting out of the vehicle.

"Lightfoot by a neck," curtly replied de Mogyns, looking his questioner full in the face to see how he took it; "Achilles second, Dorchester third."

Sharpset stared at him for a moment, as if unable to realise what he heard. "And Brother to Merrylegs," he gasped, "where was he?"

"Brother to Merrylegs," slowly repeated the Major, inwardly enjoying his rival's mortification. "Nowhere."

"Not scratched?"

"Pretty nearly the same thing as far as his *backers* (with a satirical emphasis on the word) are concerned," responded his tormentor. "Brother to Merrylegs was *left at the post!*"

A RARE CASE.

THERE was a sea fog that day. It surrounded on all sides the lonely-looking house on the cliff's edge. The house was not really lonely; but a turn in the road hid it from the coastguard station, a short mile beyond which lay a busy, populous, sea-side town. From the back of the building the downs swept upwards in gentle undulations; here and there, where the hill-side fields had been turned up by the plough, the clay showed reddish brown when the fog lifted; everywhere else a tender green hue was spread, from the thin ears of spring wheat, or the grass on the pasture land. The spot was so little lonely in reality that noises from the town mingled with the murmur of the waves upon the beach below.

You might have fancied it a place from whence no cry for help could be heard; a place for a misanthrope to live alone in; a fitting spot to be the scene of a wayside robbery. Desolate it certainly was, without any fancy in the matter. Nothing like a tree sheltered it; there were only the fields, the sky, and the waste of waters beyond the cliff's edge. The plaster had fallen from the walls, and left brown patches on them here and there. The garden was overgrown with weeds, and one or two outbuildings at the rear had been suffered to fall altogether into disrepair. The fact was the house was no longer used as the dwelling-house to the farm upon which it stood, but was to let, if anyone could be found to take it. Meantime it was in the charge of the young woman, scarcely past girlhood, who was leaning against the top bar of the gate and looking out into the fog.

She might have been watching for the tenant that never came, for at every sound upon the road she listened intently, and turned her head to follow with her eyes the different vehicles that from time to time came out of the fog on her right hand to vanish into the fog on her left, like phantom visitors from a world beyond.

Perhaps this idea of phantom visitors had suggested itself to the girl, for her eyes looked frightened, and her restless glance betrayed a mind ill at ease. Her lips moved too, as though from living much alone she had contracted a habit of talking to herself. Indifferent passers-by, chancing to notice the figure at the gate, saw only just the sort of person one would expect to see in such a place. Others who looked more attentively might have seen an unhappy, terrified girl, not yet accustomed to the place she filled just now; one for whom it might have been better to have a friend at hand; one for whom it might not be well to live alone.

"She be there again," remarked one of two men, walking at the head of a team of horses drawing a waggon-load of coals.

"She be always there," replied his companion. "I've come along days, and I've come along nights; I've passed by Stonedene in fair weather, and in storms as threatened to send the waggon over the cliff; and days or nights, fair weather or foul, I've seen her on the watch."

"On the look-out for a tenant for Master Drew," said the first speaker, cracking the long cart-whip in his hand.

"Aye; so it would appear."

"Yet the house doesn't let," remarked the other, looking back over his shoulder as they passed the gate.

"Nor it won't let! Why, who'd take it? Who in their senses leastwise?"

"Along of it being that much out of repair, you mean?"

"I don't mean no such thing. What's a day's work or so about a place like that? It won't let because it's an unlucky house. Drew is an unlucky man, and always was. There's a spell upon the house. Who but Drew would have put a mad woman in for to take charge of it? There's a spell upon it, I say."

Both men looked back, but the house was no longer visible; the fog hid it.

The next person to pass along the road was Drew himself; and it must be allowed that if Drew was really an unlucky man, he failed to look the part. There was about him a certain cheerfulness of aspect that might have defied the worst ill-luck could do him. It was in the cheerfulest of voices too, that, half checking the horse in the shafts of the light cart he drove, he called out a greeting to his care-taker as he went by: or would have gone by, had not an imploring gesture of her hand induced him to pull up altogether.

The gate at which she stood opened upon a farm track leading to the crest of the Downs. The door of the house was at the side of the track, and just within the gate which the young woman now threw open.

"Must I turn in, ma'am?" said the farmer, in his hearty voice. "Well, if there's no help for it, I suppose I must, though time presses with me this afternoon."

"Do I trouble you so often that you grudge me a few minutes? When I asked you to leave me here I promised to give no trouble; I have kept my word," she said.

"You have—to be sure you have; the more reason I should turn in now, or at any time when you make a point of it. Maybe, it is in my interest you make a point of it to-day; you think I should see to the place a bit; there's more plaster fallen. No chance of a tenant with a house in this state."

"It is an unlucky house; or so they say," she replied, glancing carelessly round upon the fallen plaster lying where it fell, and the tangled weeds in the garden.

"I don't hold with ill-luck. Law bless you, ma'am! I've seen

too much of life for that. A man makes his own luck—and a woman too."

The girl shook her head impatiently.

"I tell you they call it an unlucky house. What has it been to me? and you—did you do so well here that you can afford to laugh at the notion?"

"Times were hard," he said; "luck had naught to do with it; and times have mended with me since. But if you don't like the house, why not leave it?"

"I must earn my living," she returned, quickly. "He would be better pleased I should do that alone as I am here, than in the old way. I am sure of it, Mr. Drew."

"If the house lets ——" began the farmer, but she cut short his speech.

"If it lets I will come back to you; but till it does some one must be here, and why not I as well as another? There was a gentleman came to look over it only the other day."

"You told him what a lonesome seeming place it was, for all it stands so near the town," said the farmer, with a somewhat rueful look upon his round and cheery countenance.

"I did," she replied, eagerly; "and how the wind sweeps across the Downs; or when it blows from the sea on stormy days is so strong and fierce you can scarce keep your feet outside the door."

"And how warm it is in summer," Drew suggested.

"Certainly; I told him that as well—how there is no speck of shade anywhere within sight, except the shadow thrown by the house itself—an unlucky house, Mr. Drew."

"Aye; I've no doubt you told him all about it, and that he went away fully satisfied, and with no notion of coming to me or of wanting any further information," said Drew, drily. "That's about all the ill-luck there is, I take it—that I get no tenant."

He knew very well that he should get none as long as this woman was here; this woman who, amongst all the misfortunes she had known, would count it the greatest that could still befall her should she have to leave Stonedene.

"You have heard nothing?" she asked, after a moment or two of silence, during which her eyes had turned again to watch the road before the gate. "You would be sure and tell me if you had. It was to you he said—what did he say? Tell me the words again." She drew a step or two nearer, and laid her hand upon the side of the cart as she spoke.

"It was on the Downs ——" he began, but she interrupted him again, and took up the tale herself.

"Yes, with the sheep feeding all round. You two were alone—he had sent me back. The bells were ringing in the churches of the town—I hear them now: it was on the Downs, and he said ——"

"We walked a bit together," Drew went on, as though by

lengthening the narrative he sought to calm her, and yet knew it would all end as it had ended many times before. "It was a summer afternoon and everything was very still and peaceful, and when it came to good-bye between us, he just wrung my hand, and said, 'Take care of my wife, Drew, till I come back.'"

"Till he comes back! Oh, listen to the waves upon the shore!" she cried. "Till he comes back!" and with that fell to bitter weeping.

Her distress, which he had seen growing, and which he knew of old would overcome her at the repetition of the words he would have spared her if he could, but which she forced from his lips each time they spoke together, had an odd effect upon Drew. The respectful tone in which he had hitherto addressed her changed at once to one more familiar; he leant down from the cart and patted her upon the shoulder.

"Mattie! why, Mattie! this will never do. I've told you before that it looks as though you did not trust him after all."

"I do trust him," she sobbed.

"Of course you do; who should if we did not, you and I, who know him for a good man?"

"That's what I say!" she exclaimed; "but I like to hear you say it too. I called you in to-day to hear it, Mr. Drew."

"Come over to the farm and hear it there," he replied. But she stepped back from the cart hurriedly, crying that others did not think as he thought, that he knew as well as she did what others said, and what tale she would hear from them if she went to the farm.

Drew, ruefully conscious that "others" meant in this case his sister Eliza, looked somewhat crestfallen for a moment, then cheered up again, and bid the young girl take heart and remember that she had one friend to stand by her still.

"You do me good always," she said at last, with an effort recovering the manner in which she had first addressed him: thereby seeming, as it were, to motion him back again to the greater distance that had appeared to separate them then. "Living alone, I grow faint-hearted at times—never doubting him, you understand; never for one instant doubting him; only fearing he may be dead. What else could keep him from me? And if it is death, why that is the will of God, and I shall be reconciled to it in time—only, it is weary waiting."

"Wait and trust a while longer, ma'am," said the farmer; "we shall know the rights of it all some day. I've said so again and again, and I repeat it now. This fog hides the sky, maybe, but the sky's there all the same. Don't you get down-hearted, but wait and trust awhile longer."

He gathered up the reins as he spoke, and with one more cheerful "good-bye" disappeared along the track leading straight upwards to the crest of the Downs, in which direction his land lay, and the

house he now occupied. Having been delayed so long, he changed his mind about proceeding to the town and went towards home at once.

"What will be the end of it? I can see no further ahead in my mind than I can see through this fog to-day," he muttered to himself, as the wheels jolted along the uneven road, and the mist crept round him. "It has been a queer business, and just my luck that it should happen to Mattie of all people in the world."

Mattie's story was simple enough. Anyone would have told you it has been repeated often and often in the world's history: a common tale, and not surprising in the least. If Drew was surprised at the wrong in it, that was only because wrong was apt to surprise him. He found it easier to believe in right, and to credit men with good intentions.

The orphan child of a former servant in a wealthy family, Mattie had shared the lessons and the play of the young daughter of the house, until a time came when it was convenient to turn the humble companion adrift to work for herself. It may have been a piece of the ill-luck his neighbours ascribed to Drew, that it should have been to his farm the girl came as help to his sister, or it may have been a piece of his constitutional good-nature that made him agree to take under his roof this pretty lass, untrained for service and educated far above her station. He heard of her quite accidentally through the steward of the people who had hitherto befriended her. As for them, they were relieved to hear of a good home for her, and one far away from the park-like, heathy land, with its pines and chestnuts, in which pleasant place Mattie's lines had hitherto fallen.

Mattie had been given an education that might have satisfied a School Board inspector of to-day, and had moreover caught up little refinements of speech and manner that made her quite a superior young woman. She might have gone out as a nursery governess, but expressed herself more satisfied with a country life in a farm-house where there was a young child to look after, and light work required of her. The awakening was rude when her patrons said carelessly that the time was come for her to do something for herself, and that a suitable situation should be found for her. Mattie had a spirit of her own; she did not wait to see what would be done for her, but sought the steward, always a good friend of hers, and through him found a situation for herself: glad that it took her into quite another part of Sussex, and far from all old associations.

Drew's widowed sister, Mrs. Bankes, who lived with him, and whose child it was Mattie had come to nurse, amongst other duties too numerous to mention, for there was but one servant kept—Drew's sister exclaimed in despair when the farmer brought home the young, lady-like, delicate-looking girl:

"We want a strong, hard-working lass! This one does not know her right hand from her left. She is as good as a lady—or as bad,

and has never milked a cow in her life! What were you thinking of to bring her here?"

"She came in my way. I suppose you can teach her. She has not a friend in the world to look to."

"She will not be worth her wages."

"Ah! that's just my luck: well, we must do the best we can with her. If the steward had never mentioned her to me, now—but then he did mention her, and here she is."

There she was, and there she stayed. Apt to learn, willing to be taught, grateful for the real kindness she met with, Mattie was soon the best hand at milking for miles round, soon devoted to the baby. Three years passed quietly, and then came the romance of Mattie's life.

She was twenty that summer, and Adam Armitage, a grave man, was fully ten years her senior. A great traveller, member of a world-renowned scientific society, a student and discoverer—he was, between two scientific expeditions, refreshing heart and brain by a walking tour through the home counties. He had wandered over the level marsh lands, losing his way among the watercourses; sauntered through lanes whose hedges were one tangle of wild flowers; past villages embosomed in trees, old manors with spreading oaks and leafy beeches, and deer standing knee-deep in ferns. Then away over the Downs, walking for miles along the breezy crest of them, a wide panorama on either hand, and beneath the foot a grassy track, hardly visible at times, but reappearing again: and if faithfully followed leading straight to the sea-side town near to which was Drew's farm, and Mattie milking her cows, playing with the child amongst the hay, singing at her work, and all unconscious of coming fate.

Adam's walking tour ended at the farm Drew had taken only a year before, and the dwelling-house it had been found more convenient to inhabit than the smaller building on the old land close to the road. Mr. Armitage found the pure air of the Downs good for him. He hired a little upper chamber, from the window of which one could inhale the strong sea breeze that yet came to it, subtly scented from the blossoming clover across which it blew. He made friends with all the family. To Mattie it was delightful to meet once more some one with all the tricks of speech and manner of the more refined society amongst which her youth had been passed. Little Harry followed this new friend wherever he went; Harry's mother called him a right-down pleasant gentleman; the farmer called him a good man..

Drew took this idea from the long talks the men had together, and to which Mattie would listen, humbly feeling that, in spite of her own superior education, the farmer had more in common with Mr. Armitage, and understood him better than she could. Living in a practical work-a-day world himself, the world of science had a wonderful fascination for Drew. He liked few things better than to hear of recent discoveries, and the light thrown by them upon re-

vealed religion. For to the farmer it was light and not darkness. He was not afraid of new ideas; not afraid of growth even in religion, or that, in growing, it should not adapt itself to the progress of knowledge. Drew found Christianity quite elastic enough for that, and said that the one Truth could be made to embrace all truths. Adam Armitage was a man after the farmer's own heart. He did not know much about his guest; indeed no one questioned him as to who he was or whence he came; it was from what he knew of him personally—of his thoughts, and words, and ways, that Drew called him a good man.

They all missed him when he went away, Mattie most of all; but the following summer saw him there again, a welcome old friend this time, and no stranger.

Drew, a keen observer of all that went on around him, was not so much taken by surprise as his sister was, when one day, towards the end of this second visit, Adam and Mattie were both mysteriously missing. A strong-armed country lass made her appearance before night. She was the bearer of a note from Mattie, confessing that she and Mr. Armitage were married, and hoping the little servant sent might supply her place so that no one would be inconvenienced. Drew might shake his head and look thoughtful, but Mr. Armitage was his own master, and it was not the first time a gentleman had married a country lass. Besides, the deed was done, and past recall. They had gone quietly to one of the churches in the town from whence the sound of bells floated up to the farm, and had been married by special licence. Adam had taken a lodging for his bride, and there they passed one brief, bright week of happiness; then one morning walked quietly back together, Mattie blushing and smiling, and looking so lovely and ladylike in a simple dress such as she used to wear before she came to the farm, that they hardly knew her.

Adam explained that he meant to leave his wife for two days—no more—in the care of her old friends; at the end of that time he would return to fetch her. There were arrangements to make with regard to the scientific expedition about to start immediately. It would sail without him now, but it behoved him to do his best that his place should be as well filled as might be. There was also his mother to see, and to prepare for receiving Mattie. In a day or two at farthest he would be back.

Mattie walked a little way with her husband and the farmer, along the breezy uplands, and then Adam sent her back, and hastened his own steps in the direction of the little station at the foot of the Downs. When he came again he said, laughing, that it would be from B—— Station, and that he would drive in a fly through the Stonedene Gate and along the track, the only approach to a carriage road leading to the farm.

"I shall have a box of fine things to bring for my little wife," he cried, casting a loving glance at the lovely face at his side.

Mattie answered that she wanted no fine things, but went away smiling as he meant she should do, and only paused now and then to look after the two men as long as they remained in sight. It was natural that she should feel a little afraid of this unknown lady, Adam's mother, but that fear was the only shadow on Mattie's path. She had given her heart frankly away, and an instinct seemed to assure her that she had given it into safe keeping. It was an idyll, a poem, as true a love story as the world has seen, that had written itself here in this out-of-the-way spot on the lonely Sussex Downs: and for two days longer Mattie was in Paradise—a fool's Paradise, Eliza Bankes said later.

On the third day they might look for Adam to return, but that day passed, and many another, until the days were weeks, and the weeks months, and he neither came nor wrote. Mattie remembered how when she had turned to look back for the last time upon that homeward walk, she had seen his figure distinct against the sky for one instant, and in the next lost it entirely as he passed out of sight over the swelling line of hills. Just so she seemed to have lost him in one instant out of her life. And yet, she never lost faith and trust in him; never ceased to watch for his coming again.

It was not long before Mrs. Bankes, who had once believed in him as much as any of them, began to shrug her shoulders, and remark that it was a poor tale, but a common one enough. Mattie had had her way, and made Mr. Armitage marry her, but he had regretted it as soon as the deed was done; they would never see anything more of him; she might make up her mind to that; only Drew ought to hunt him out and force him to make Mattie an allowance, or do something—Mrs. Bankes did not clearly specify what—to make it up to her, since it was evident that, supposing the marriage was a true one—and how could they tell whether it was or not when the girl had gone off in that sly way by herself, which was not by any means conduct they had a right to expect from her—even if the marriage was a true one and Mattie a wife at all, what was she but a deserted wife for the rest of her days?

Drew after a time, either goaded to the step by his sister's loud-voiced arguments, or prompted to it by his own sense of what was due to Mattie, not only took pains to ascertain that the marriage was real enough, but the further pains of searching for and finding the address of Adam Armitage in London. By that time Mattie had fully made up her mind that her husband *had*, after all, sailed with the expedition, and that his letters to herself had either miscarried or been intercepted. She was ready to make up her mind to anything rather than to admit the faintest suggestion that he was false to her and to himself—to the high standard that she knew, and that the farmer knew, was the one by which Adam measured men and things, and his own life and conduct. It was strange how this girl and her former master both trusted Adam in the face of his

inexplicable silence; in the face of even a more ominous discovery made by Drew when in town—the discovery that he had never mentioned Mattie's name to his mother, or alluded to Mattie at all. As for Adam, Mrs. Armitage had declared he was not with her then, and that she could not give an address that would find him: an assertion that confirmed Mattie in the idea that he had started on those far-away travels he had so often spoken of to her.

As autumn passed and the evenings grew chill with the breath of the coming winter, Mattie's health seemed to fail. The deep melancholy that oppressed her threatened to break the springs of life. In order to escape from Mrs. Bankes the girl took to lonely wanderings over the Downs; wanderings that ended always at Stonedene; until, with the instinct of a wounded animal that seeks to endure its pain alone, or from the ever present recollection of the last words of Adam, when he had said it was by way of Stonedene that he would return, she besought the farmer to send away the woman in charge of the house and allow her to take her place. From the day of her marriage, merrily at first, and as though half amused at her rise in life, but later in the hope of giving her such comfort as might come from showing his own trust in Adam, Drew had been particular in addressing her by her new title. Mattie was as much soothed by this behaviour as she was ruffled by the opposite conduct of Mrs. Bankes. A certain little dignity of demeanour grew upon young Mrs. Armitage, who yet insisted upon earning her own bread, since Adam's wife must not be dependent upon the charity of even so good a friend as the farmer.

Drew yielded to the wish of the wife, whose heart was breaking with the pain of absence, and the mystery of silence, and Mattie, on this foggy day had already lived months at Stonedene, on the watch always for the coming of Adam.

The fog increased instead of diminishing with the approach of evening. Drew could not see his own house until he was close to it; as he had remarked, the mystery of Mattie's affairs was not more impenetrable than the veil hiding all natural objects just then. When he had put up the horse and gone in to tea, Mrs. Bankes, as she bustled about, preparing the meal that Mattie's deft little fingers had been wont to set out with so much quietness as well as celerity, did not fail to greet him with the question: "Well, how is she?"

"She" had come to mean Mattie in the vocabulary of the farmer and his sister.

"About as usual in health," Drew replied, lifting the now five-year-old Harry to his knee; "but troubled in mind; though, to be sure, that is as usual too"

"She is *out* of her mind," exclaimed Mrs. Bankes irritably. She had been fond of Mattie, and not indifferent to the value of so fine a subject for gossip as the stolen marriage and the disappearance of the bridegroom; but Mrs. Bankes had long ago wearied of the

state of affairs, and wished for some change in them; for something new to talk about. "Mattie is out of her mind," she repeated. "Everyone but yourself knows that; and if you do not know it, it is only because you are as mad as she is—or anyone might think so from the way you go on."

"Nay, nay," said Drew gently, as the butter-dish was set upon the table with a vehemence that made the tea-cups rattle. "There are no signs of madness about Mattie—unless you call her trust in her husband by so hard a name."

"Husband! a pretty husband, indeed! I've no patience with him, nor with you either. As if it was not a common tale enough! It would be better to persuade the girl to come home and get to work again, than to encourage her in her fancies, while you pay another servant here—and times so hard as they are."

"Oh, that is just my luck," observed Drew, laughing.

"Luck! don't talk to me of ill-luck, when it is, and always has been, nothing but the weakmindedness of helping other folks that ought to stand alone." Mrs. Bankes did not allude, although she might have done so, to how much her brother had helped *her*. "If you minded only your own concerns you'd be a lucky man enough. You are not fool enough to suppose Stonedene will let as long as Mattie's there, I hope. Fetch her home, and don't go calling her 'Ma'am,' and making believe to see things as she sees them."

"It is no make-believe on my part. I can't bring myself to think ill of a man who showed me so much of his mind as Mr. Armitage did. I don't say I can understand, or can even give a guess at what has happened, but I do say I am certain it can be explained. To be sure, it may be as Mattie fears and he may be dead, and if so, we shall never have the explanation. Still, I judge him, as his wife does, by what I know him to be at heart—and that is a good man, if ever there was one."

"Stuff!" cried Eliza, fairly losing her temper. "I judge people by their actions. What else can one go by? Handsome is as handsome does, I say."

"I was thinking to-day," the farmer went on, softly passing his broad palm over the blond head of the child upon his knee: "I was thinking as I came along of how it stands written: 'He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' And it may be true also that we cannot properly trust in Heaven if we have no trust at all in man—in good men, I mean."

"It is to be hoped you know what you mean, for I don't," snapped Eliza, who, not in the habit of bringing Heaven into her own conversation, was uncomfortable when her brother did so. Her Bible lay upon the window-ledge, and during the week gathered no more dust upon its red cover than the Bibles of most busy people do.

When she had that book in her hand and her best bonnet on her head on a Sunday afternoon, Eliza Bankes considered herself as religious a woman as need be. She had small patience with her brother's trick of dragging religion into all the affairs of daily life. Mr. Armitage used to do the same, and he certainly had proved himself not better, but much worse, than the generality of men.

"You should bestir yourself," Mrs. Bankes continued. "You should do something, instead of sitting down to trust in the goodness of a man whose actions prove him a villain."

"What *can* I do?" said the farmer, recapitulating, more for his own momentary satisfaction than in answer to his sister, the little he had already done, that little being all that appeared to him feasible. "I went to London; Mrs. Armitage was on the eve of a journey; I went a second time, to find her gone and the establishment broken up. A proud woman she seemed; a woman who always held her head high, I should say: no wonder my errand displeased her."

"Stuck-up, fine madam!" cried Eliza, reaching down a pile of old delft plates from the dresser. "A fine time Mattie would have had of it amongst them—not that it makes the case any the better for the man who played her false."

At that instant the shadowy form of some one going round to the front door passed the window, against which the fog pressed closely. Drew set little Harry on his feet, and rose slowly, listening with intentness and a surprised look that made his sister ask what ailed him.

"Rover—the dog does not bark; who—by the mercy of Heaven, it is the man himself!" cried Drew, as the room door opened with a suddenness that caused Mrs. Bankes to drop the plates on the brick floor. For Adam Armitage stood upon the threshold: Adam, pale and worn, a shadow of his former self, but himself unmistakably.

For an instant a pin might have been heard to fall in the dead silence that fell upon the group. Outside, like a thick curtain hung the white fog; within, the lifting of the veil was at hand. Yet it was hardly curiosity, certainly not doubt, that might have been read in the eyes of the farmer, as, the first shock of surprise over, the two men faced each other. Adam had looked round the room as though seeking some one, had smiled in his old fashion at Harry, given a half curious, half indifferent glance to Eliza Bankes, and then turned to the farmer.

"Drew," he said simply, "where is my wife?"

"Mrs. Armitage is waiting for you at Stonedene, sir; there was some talk of your coming back that way."

Drew spoke almost as though no more than the two days agreed upon had passed since they met last, and Mrs. Bankes stooped to gather up the fallen pieces of crockery.

"Waiting!" Adam threw up his hands with a passionate gesture; "what can she have thought?"

"She has thought you were gone after all upon that voyage, and

that your letters had miscarried. Sometimes she has thought that you were dead, Mr. Armitage, but never——" Drew broke off and held out his hand: "We knew you could explain what has happened, sir," he concluded.

Adam drew his own hand across his eyes, in the way a man might do who has lately been roused from a bad dream and has some trouble to collect his thoughts.

"That has happened," he said, "which, if it had not befallen me myself and become a part of my own experience, I should find it difficult to believe possible. A strange thing has happened, and yet"—here the old smile they remembered so well broke slowly like light over his face—"and yet a thing not more strange, as the world goes, than that you—I say nothing of Mattie—but that you should have trusted me throughout. I detected no mistrust in your voice, no doubt in your eyes, not even when they first met mine just now. They call mine a rare case, friend; they might say the same of your belief in me. But—Stonedene did you say? Walk with me there, and hear my tale as we go."

"This evening; and in this mist; and you, sir, looking far from well," began Eliza Bankes, the colour in her cheeks of course attributable only to her having stooped over the broken plates. "Mattie has waited so long already that one night more will make but little difference."

"One night, one *hour* more than I can help will make all the difference between wilful wrong and a misfortune that has fallen on both alike," said Adam. He would not be dissuaded from setting out at once, and in another minute the two men were pursuing their way through the driving mist, Adam talking as they went.

That which had befallen him had caused huge rejoicings amongst certain of his friends: men whose names stood high in the medical world of science, and who were grateful to him beyond measure for affording them so fine an opportunity of studying a rare case. After parting from Mattie, he had taken train to London, where arriving in due course, he drove in a cab towards his mother's house in Grosvenor Street, within a few yards of which his cab overturned and Adam was thrown out, falling heavily upon his head. They said his skull was fractured. After a long interval, however, he opened his eyes and recovered consciousness; and, as he did so, slowly at first, after a time more fully, the astounding discovery was made that memory was entirely gone. It took not days, but weeks to make sure of this. The symptom was attributed to brain fever, to the effects of the shock; to one thing, then to another; but as time went on and the mind struggled in vain to remember, just as the body might vainly have tried to use a crushed or paralysed limb, the doctors all arrived at the same conclusion. Some portion of the injured skull, pressing upon the brain, had paralysed the nerve of memory.

The one or two other authentic cases of a like condition were eagerly cited, and a babble of learned talk arose over poor Adam, who could not tell whence he came or whither he had been going when the accident happened. To be sure, he re-learnt by degrees from others, his mother especially, the past which was mysteriously blotted out from his own experience; but that which no one but himself had known, no one could now recall to him. His Sussex walking tour, the lonely farm upon the Downs, Mattie, his marriage and brief honeymoon were to his paralysed mind as though they had never been, but for a sense of irreparable loss that seemed to weigh upon him and made the misery of his life.

However, this state was one from which, so said his friends, science could at will recall him, and the operation necessary to restore Adam to himself was deferred only until his health admitted of its being attended by a minimum of risk.

It was while Adam was in the state above described that Drew had seen Mrs. Armitage. A proud woman, often as she had wished that her son would settle in life, she was ill pleased to hear he had married a farm servant: for that was the one fact that, stripped of Drew's panegyrics upon Mattie's superior education and refined manners, alone stared her in the face.

Hastily resolving that there was no need to embitter her own life by any attempt to recall to her son this ill-fated marriage, and that therefore the experiment of allowing him to see the farmer or to hear Mattie's name should not be made, she did not hesitate to deceive her unwelcome visitor. Change of scene had been ordered for the patient, and before Drew called at the house in Grosvenor Street for the second time, Adam and his mother were gone. It was in Paris, months after, that the operation was finally and successfully performed, and then, the first word of Adam, was Mattie's name. The first effort of his newly recovered powers was to relate to his mother the history of his marriage and to write to his wife.

"God grant the suspense has neither killed her nor driven her mad!" he exclaimed.

It was to his mother's hand the letter was confided, and with that exclamation of his ringing in her ears, Mrs. Armitage stood beside the brazier filled with charcoal and burning in the ante-room of their apartment in the Champs Elysées. She was not a bad woman, but the temptation was too strong to allow this affair to unravel itself, and see what would turn up. If the girl were dead, why no harm had been done, and this terrible mistake of her son's was rectified at once. If the other alternative were to prove true and Mattie had lost her senses, Adam would be equally free from her, or measures could be taken to ensure so desirable a result. Mrs. Armitage tore the letter into pieces and waited by the brazier until the fragments were charred. Adam asked no awkward questions, and was not even surprised at receiving no answer to his epistle, since in it he had an-

nounced his coming. The first day his health admitted of it, he set out alone for England.

Such was the story; one that Adam himself knew only in part, being ignorant of his mother's share in it. When Drew had told of his efforts to seek Adam, and had mentioned that no letter had reached Mattie, Adam was at no loss to understand at once the part his mother had played. But he never spoke of it, then or at any future time.

The house door at Stonedene stood ajar; evening had closed in now, and the chilly fog was still abroad, but the figure at the gate was dimly discernible.

Adam hastened his steps.

"For heaven's sake, sir, be careful! the suddenness of it might turn her brain," cried Drew, laying a detaining hand upon the arm of his companion.

Adam gently shook him off.

"Suddenness," he repeated. "Aye, it is sudden to you—and to Mrs. Bankes. I was sorry, by the way, that the delft plates were broken—but for me and for Mattie whose thoughts are day and night, night and day full of each other, how can it be sudden?"

Drew stood still, and Adam went on alone, until his footsteps became audible and Mattie turned her head to see him standing at her side.

Adam had been right; no fear was there for Mattie's brain. All excitement, all surprise and wonder came afterwards; at that first supreme moment, and with a satisfied sigh, as of a child who has got all it wants, Mattie held out her arms to him, with one word—

"Husband!"

As Adam drew her to him it was not only the mist, or the darkening evening that blinded Drew so that for a moment or two he saw neither of them.

People say Drew's luck has turned from the day Stonedene found a tenant. It is newly done up and prettily furnished now; Mr. and Mrs. Armitage come down there once or twice a year, with their children, for a breath of sea air and to visit old friends.

LOOKING BACK.

Are the sun-ripe apples gathered?
Do the violets scent the bed?
The almond-breathing clematis
Full clustered overhead?
Is the autumn air as balmy,
And the evening sky as red?

Are ruddy leaves yet falling
On the dew-ensilvered lawn?
Do butterflies still flicker
When the vapours are withdrawn
Over blossoms flush'd or fading,
Fire-tinted as the dawn?

Is light and shadow dreaming
In the sheltered laurel glade?
In the wilderness I planted
Do the birds sing undismayed—
The old birds, and the nestlings
That were hatched beneath its shade?

The shapes of breezy whiteness
That gamboll'd at my feet,
With eager eyes, and loving cries,
And life at fever-heat—
They are resting in the twilight
Of that ever-green retreat.

O sweet it was to loiter
With one no longer Here;
The sunny stillness shaken
By carols loud and clear:
Our pleasant talk suspended
For joys of eye and ear.

To greet the budding spring-time
And watch the year's decay,
And make my heart the counterpart
Of Nature's ebb and play,
That weeps and grieves, and sheds her leaves,
To smile again in May.

C. M. Gemmer.

ELLEN EDWARDS

T. AND E. TAYLOR.

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THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

CHAPTER XIII.

WINTER AT HERON DYKE.

THE mellow autumn months darkened and died slowly into winter. The wild winds that are born in the bitter north blew in stronger and fiercer gusts, and the majestic monotone of the sea grew louder and more triumphant as the huge tides broke in white-lipped wrath against the shuddering sands. There came tidings of fishing-boats that never found their way back home, of great ships in the offing that made signals of distress, of dead bodies washed up here and there along the shore. The Easterby lifeboat was ever ready to brave the fiercest seas; while miles away across the seething waters, at once a signal of warning and of hope, the ruddy beacon of Easterby lighthouse shone clear and steady through the darkest night: it was like the eye of Faith shining across the troubled waters of Life.

At Heron Dyke, to all outward seeming, the winter months brought little or no change in the monotony of life within its four grey walls. And yet there were some changes; all of which, unimportant as they might seem if taken singly, had a distinct bearing on events to come. The two housemaids, Martha and Ann, to whom Aaron Stone had given warning in his anger at what he called their folly, were not forgiven. They left the Hall at the expiration of the month's notice, giving place to two strong young women who came all the way from London; and who, never having been in the country before, were supposed to be superior to the ordinary run of superstitious fancies which so powerfully affect the rural mind. Aaron took care that Martha and Ann should be clear of the house before Phemie and

Eliza arrived at it: there should be no collusion with the new comers if he could prevent it.

All went well at first. Phemie and Eliza felt dull, but were sufficiently comfortable. They had plenty to eat, and little to do. Not having been told that the Hall was supposed to be haunted, to them the north wing was the same as any other part of the house, and they neither saw nor heard anything to frighten them. The deaf and stolid cook kept herself, as usual, to herself, and said nothing. Indeed, it may be concluded that she had nothing to say. Had a whole army of apparitions placed themselves in a row before her at the "witching hour o' night," it would not have affected her; she utterly despised them, and the belief that could put faith in them.

Old Aaron chuckled at the success of his new arrangements. "We shall be bothered with no more cock-and-bull stories about grisly ghosts now," thought he.

But, though the new maids were safe enough from hearing gossip inside the house, they were not out of it. Aaron, however good his will might be, could not keep them within for ever: they must go to church, they must go to the village; they claimed, although strangers in the place, a half-holiday now and then. And the first half-holiday that Phemie had, something came of it.

The girl made the best of her way to Nullington. Small though the town was, it had its shops; and shops have a wonderful fascination for the female heart. Into one and into another went Phemie, making acquaintance with this vendor of wares and with that. Mysterious things were talked of; and when she got back to the Hall at night, she had a rare budget of strange news to tell Eliza.

The Hall was haunted. At least, the north wing of it was. A young woman, Miss Winter's maid, had mysteriously disappeared in it one night last winter, and had never been heard of since. The two previous housemaids had been nearly terrified out of their wits afterwards. They had heard doors clash after dark that were never shut by mortal hands; they had heard a voice that sobbed and sighed along the passages at midnight; and they had been once awakened by a strange tapping at their bed-room door, as if someone were seeking to come in. More dreadful than all, they had seen the deathlike face of the missing girl staring down at them over the balusters of the gallery in the great entrance-hall: and it was for being frightened at this, for speaking of it, they were turned away! —which was shamefully unjust. All this disquieting news, with the observations made on it, had Mistress Phemie contrived to pick up in the course of one afternoon's shopping, and to bring home to Eliza.

The two servants had now plenty to talk about in the privacy of their own room; and talk they did: but they were wise enough at present to keep their own counsel, and to wait with a sort of dread expectancy for what time might bring forth. Would they hear

strange sobbings and sighings in the night? would a ghostly face stare suddenly out upon them from behind some dark corner when they least expected it? The dull depths of these girls' minds were stirred as they had never been stirred before. They half hoped and wholly dreaded the happening of something—they knew not what.

Meanwhile they began to go timorously about the house, to shun the north wing most carefully after dark, and to keep together after candles were lighted. Old Aaron, silently watching, was not slow to mark these signs and tokens, though he took no outward notice. While his wife Dorothy, watching also in her superstitious fear, drew in her mind the conclusion that the girls were being disturbed as the other two girls had been.

It fell out one afternoon, about three weeks after Phemie had brought her strange tidings from Nullington, that Eliza was sent to the town on an errand by her mistress, Mrs. Stone: for, to all intents and purposes, Dorothy Stone acted as the women-servants' mistress, whether Miss Winter might be in the house, or whether she was out of it. Eliza was later in starting than she ought to have been, and she was longer doing her errands—for she took the opportunity to make purchases on her own account—and it was dusk before she turned back to Heron Dyke. It was a pleasant evening, cold but dry, with the stars coming out one after another, as she went quickly along the quiet country road, thinking of her mother and sisters far away. She turned into the park by the lodge on the Easterby road, stopping for a couple of minutes' gossip with Mrs. Tilney, the gardener's wife. How pleasant and homelike the little lodge looked, Eliza thought, full of ruddy fire-light; for Hannah Tilney would not light the lamp till her husband should arrive. The elder girl was making toast for her father's tea, the younger one was hushing her doll to sleep, while Mrs. Tilney herself was setting out the tea-cups, and the kettle was singing on the hob—all awaiting the return of the good husband and father.

Bidding the lodge good-night, Eliza went on her way. It was quite dark by this time, and although the hour was early she did not much like her lonely walk through the park. She was not used to the country, and the solitude frightened her a little; fancy whispering that a tramp might be lurking behind every tree. She pictured to herself the lights and bustle of London streets, and was sorry she had left them. Leaving the carriage-drive to the right when she got within two or three hundred yards of the Hall, she turned into a shrubbery that led to the servants' entrance. It did seem very lonely here, and she hurried on, glancing timidly from right to left, her heart beating a little faster than ordinary.

Suddenly a low scream burst from her lips. A dark figure, emerging from behind a clump of evergreens, stood full in her path, and placed its hand on her arm. Eliza stood still; she had no

other choice; and trembled as she had never trembled before. It was a woman: she could see that much now.

"Won't you please let me speak with you?" cried a gentle voice, which somehow served to reassure Eliza.

"My patience!" cried she, anger bubbling up in the reaction of feeling, "how came you to frighten me like that? I was thinking of —of—all kinds of startling things. What do you want?"

"You are one of the new maids at the Hall," rejoined the figure, in low, beseeching accents, "and I have been trying for weeks to get to speak to you."

"Who are you?—and what do you want with me?" demanded Eliza.

"I am Susan Keen."

"Susan Keen," repeated the servant, not remembering at the moment why the name should seem familiar to her. "Well, I don't know you, if you are."

"My sister lived at the Hall, Miss Winter's maid, and she disappeared in her bed-room one night last winter," went on poor Susan, with a kind of sob. "It was full of mystery. Even Mr. Kettle says that."

"Oh yes, to be sure," cordially replied Eliza, her sympathies aroused now. "Poor Katherine Keen! Yes. What *did* become of her?"

Susan shook her head. It was a question no one could answer. "I want you to help me find out," she whispered.

The avowal struck Eliza with a sort of alarm. "Good gracious!" she cried.

"I want you to help me find some traces of her—my poor lost sister," continued Susan, "some clue to the mystery of her fate ——"

"But what could *I* do, even if I were willing?" interrupted the housemaid.

"You are inside the house, I am outside," replied Susan, with a sob. "Your chances are greater than mine. Oh, won't you help me? At any moment, when least expected, some link might show itself; the merest accident, as mother says, might put us on the right track. Have you no pity for her?"

"I've a great deal of pity for her; I never heard so strange and pitiful a tale in all my life," was the reply. "Phemie was told all about it when she went into Nullington. But, you know, she may not be dead."

"She is dead," shivered Susan. "Oh, believe that. I am as sure of it as that we two are standing here. At first I didn't believe she was dead; I couldn't; but now that the months have gone on, and on, I feel that there's no hope. If she were alive she would not fail to let us know it to ease our sorrow—all this while! Katherine was more loving and thoughtful than you can tell."

"It's said she had no sweetheart: or else ——" Eliza was beginning. But the other went on, never hearing.

"If she were not dead, she would not come to me so often in my dreams—and she's always dead in them. And, look here," added the girl in awed tones, drawing a step nearer and gently pressing again Eliza's arm: "I wish someone could tell me why her hair is always wet when she appears. I can see water dripping from the ends of it."

Eliza shuddered, and glanced involuntarily around.

"Sometimes she calls me as if from a distance, and then I awake," resumed Susan. "She wants me to find her—I know that; but I never can, though I am looking for her continually."

"This poor thing must be crazed," thought the bewildered woman-servant.

"And I've fancied that you might help me. I've come about here at night, wanting to see you, and ask you, for ever so long. You can watch, and look, and listen when you are going about your work in the house, and perhaps you will come upon her, or some trace of her."

"Good mercy! You surely can't think she is *in* the house!" exclaimed Eliza.

"I am sure she's in it."

"What—dead?"

"She must be dead. She can't be alive—all these weary weeks and months."

"I never heard of such a belief," cried Eliza. "What it is that's thought—leastways, as it has been told to me and my fellow-servant, Phemie—is, that it is her spirit that is in the house, and haunts it."

"Her spirit does haunt it," affirmed poor Susan. "But she is there too."

Eliza felt as if a rush of cold air were passing over her.

"Something wrong was done to her; she was killed in some way; and I'd sooner think it was by a woman than a man," went on Susan dreamily. "It all happened in the north wing. And then they carried her away for concealment to one of the dark unused rooms in it, and left her there, shut up—perhaps for ever. That's how it must have been."

"Dear me!" gasped Eliza, hardly knowing, in her dismay, whether this was theory or fact.

"And so if you could watch, and come upon any clue, and would kindly bring it to us, me and mother, we'd be ever grateful. Perhaps you know our inn—the Leaning Gate—as you go from here to Nullington."

"Stay a moment," said Eliza, a thought striking her: "does your mother think all this that you've been telling me?—does she want me to watch?"

"Mother does not know I've come to you, or that I've ever had thought of coming, else she might have stopped me," answered the girl candidly, for poor Susan Keen was truth itself. "But she knows

Katherine must be in the house, dead or alive; she says that. Good-evening, and thank you, and I'm sorry I startled you."

She walked away at a swift pace. Eliza looked after her for a moment, and then ran home shivering, not daring to glance to the right or to the left.

When the last fine days of autumn were over and the cold weather was fairly set in, Squire Denison had ceased to drive out in his brougham, and was seen no more beyond the suite of rooms that were set apart for his personal use. Early in November his lawyer, Mr. Daventry, was sent for, and received certain final instructions respecting his will.

About the same time a fresh inmate came to Heron Dyke and took up her abode there for the time being. The person in question was a certain Mrs. Dexter, a professional nurse, who had been sent for from London by Dr. Jago's express desire. She was a plain-looking middle-aged woman, whose manners and address were superior to her station in life. A woman of few words, she seldom spoke except when someone put a question to her. She went quietly and deftly about her duties and employed all her spare time in reading. A sitting-room was allotted her next Mr. Denison's, and she never mixed with the servants. No one at the Hall, unless it was Hubert Stone, knew that Mrs. Dexter was an elder sister of Dr. Jago's wife. It might be that the treatment pursued by that undoubtedly clever practitioner, and which at present seemed to succeed, was of too hazardous a nature to be entrusted to, or witnessed by, an ordinary nurse.

Then came another movement. Within a few days of Mrs. Dexter's arrival at the Hall, the carpenter, Shalders, was sent for from Nullington. Receiving his orders, he proceeded to put up two doors covered with green baize, one in each of the corridors leading to Mr. Denison's rooms. The household wondered much; the neighbourhood talked; for Shalders had a tongue, and did not keep the measure a secret. It was to ensure himself more quiet that the Squire had had it done, said Shalders. Day and night these doors were kept locked. Four people only, each of whom had a pass-key, were allowed to penetrate beyond them: Dr. Jago, Mrs. Dexter, Aaron Stone, and Hubert. Anything that took place on the other side of those mysterious doors was as little known to the rest of the inmates of the Hall as if they had been a hundred miles away. In Nullington, people could not cease wondering about these baize-covered doors, and were generally of opinion that Squire Denison was growing more crazy than ever.

Ella never failed to write to her uncle once a week, and once a week the Squire dictated to Hubert a few lines of reply. In these notes he always told her his health was improving; that he grew better and stronger. For weeks after he had ceased to leave his own

rooms, he wrote to Ella—in his unselfishness, let us suppose—about his drives out and how the fresh crisp winter air seemed to give him strength. Ella expressed a strong desire to be back at home by New Year's Day; but the Squire's answer to her request, while kind, was yet so peremptory in tone that she was afraid to mention the subject again. He told her she was not to make herself uneasy about him, and that, now she was abroad, she had better enjoy herself and see everything that was worth seeing: when he wanted her back at the Hall he would not fail to send for her, but till that time she had better continue on her travels. If the body of the letter seemed hard to Ella, there was no lack of loving messages at its end. "You are always in my thoughts," he wrote. "I see your face in the firelight; I hear the rustle of your dress behind my chair; half-a dozen times a day I could affirm that I heard you singing in the next room. When you come back to me in spring, my darling, I will never let you go away again."

To Ella his letters would read almost like a contradiction. He could write thus, evidently pining for her, and yet would not allow her to return. She comforted herself with the reassurance that he must be better. Not the faintest hint was given to her in any one of the letters that Mrs. Dexter, a sick nurse, had taken up her abode at Heron Dyke.

Hubert Stone received several private notes from Ella, asking for full and special information respecting the state of her uncle's health. The writer of them little thought how they were treasured up and covered with kisses. To each of them Hubert wrote a few guarded lines of reply, confirming the general tenour of Mr. Denison's own letters. Miss Winter, he said, had no cause for uneasiness: Mr. Denison was certainly stronger than he had been for two years past. A few old friends of the Squire called at the Hall occasionally and enquired respecting his health. Now and again he would see one or other of them for a few minutes and talk away as if nothing were the matter with him.

But after the middle of December no visitors of any kind were admitted. They were told that the Squire was much as usual, but that his medical man, Dr. Jago, enjoined perfect rest as indispensable to him. When Dr. Spreckley heard this, he differed completely. "I always told Mr. Denison that he ought to see more company than he did," said Spreckley. "He wanted rousing more out of himself. The sight of a fresh face and a little lively conversation never failed to do him good."

It was a marvel to Dr. Spreckley that the Squire still lived. He wondered much what treatment was being pursued, not believing that any treatment known to him could keep him in life; he marvelled at other things.

"Hang it all!" cried the Doctor one day to himself. "I can't see daylight in it. Shut up in his rooms from people's sight; green-

baize doors put up to keep out the household !—what does it mean ? Are they treating him to a course of slow poisons ? Upon my word, if it were not that the object is to keep the Squire in life, I should think there was a conspiracy to send him out of it, and that they don't want to be watched at their work. But it is a strange thing that he yet lives."

That was, to Dr. Spreckley, the strangest thing of all. Morning after morning, as it arose, did he expect to hear the news of the Squire's death; but winter wore on, and the old year died out, and still the tidings came not. Dr. Spreckley marvelled more and more; but he said nothing to anybody.

CHAPTER XIV.

DR. DOWNES' SNUFF-BOX.

THAT winter in Norfolk was an exceptionally severe one. Lady Cleeve, whose health had been waning for some time past, felt the cold more severely than she had ever done before, and was rarely out of her own home. Trusting her son so thoroughly, the twelve hundred pounds had now been transferred to him, as promised, and stood in his name in the books of Nullington Bank. And to Philip life seemed to have become well worth living. The fact that he could draw cheques now on his own account—ay, and find them duly honoured—was a new and delightful item in his experience. His sunny, debonair face might be seen everywhere with a smile upon it: he had a kind look for this neighbour, meeting him in the street: a pleasant word for that one. He carried fascination with him; and, whatever might be his faults, it was impossible to help liking Philip Cleeve.

"A thousand pounds will be quite enough for Tiplady," he decided, after some mental debate, carried on at intervals. "If the old fellow lets me join him at all, he'll take me for that: money's nothing to him."

This, you perceive, would leave Mr. Philip two hundred pounds to play with: a very desirable acquisition. But the partnership question remained as yet in abeyance. Mr. Tiplady was very much engaged with some troublesome private affairs of his own at this period, was often from home; and for the time being seemed to have forgotten his talk with Lady Cleeve about the partnership.

Philip was particularly careful not to refresh his memory. His mother felt anxious now and then that no progress was being made: she spoke to Philip about it, only to have her fears pooh-poohed, and be put off in that young gentleman's laughing, easy-going style. "A month or two more or less cannot make any possible difference, mother," he said one day. "Besides, I don't think it would be wise to bother Tiplady just now. It will be time enough to speak when he has got through his law-suit with Jarvis."

It did not take Philip Cleeve very long to make a considerable hole in the two hundred pounds: set aside in his own mind as a margin to be used for whatever contingencies might arise. In the first place, his I O U to Freddy Bootle for his losses at cards in October had to be redeemed, Freddy having lent him the money to square up: although it might have stood over for an indefinite period as far as Freddy was concerned. This of itself ran away with a considerable sum. Then Philip discovered that he had been in the habit of dressing less well than was desirable, and so replenished his wardrobe throughout. After that, chancing to be one day at the jeweller's, he took a fancy to a gold hunting-watch and a couple of expensive rings. The latter articles he would draw off and slip into his pocket when going into his mother's presence; while of the existence of the watch she knew nothing. Not for a great deal would he have had Lady Cleeve suspect that he had touched a penny of the twelve hundred pounds. Yes, he had faults, this Master Philip.

For some little time past, he had taken to be more from home than usual, in the evening, and to return to it later. Lady Cleeve did not grumble; she but thought he was at the Vicarage, or at the house of some other friend. He was more often at The Lilacs than she was at all aware of. Not that she would have objected: she rather liked Captain Lennox; and she knew nothing of the high play carried on there, or of the unearthly hours that it sometimes pleased Mr. Philip to come in.

It was not the play, though, that made Philip's chief attraction at The Lilacs. It was Mrs. Ducie. His pleasantest evenings were those when cards were not brought out, when the time was filled with conversation and music. On such occasions Philip left at the sober hour of eleven o'clock, and had nothing to reproach himself with next morning; unless it were, perhaps, that when in the fascinating company of Mrs. Ducie, he almost forgot the existence of Maria Kettle.

Yet it was impossible to say that Margaret Ducie gave him any special encouragement, or led him on in any way. She was probably aware of his admiration for her, but there was nothing that savoured of the coquette in her mode of treating him. She was gracious and easy and pleasant, and that was all that could be said: and she drew an impalpable line between them which Philip felt that it would not be wise on his part to attempt to overpass. Meanwhile life was rendered none the less pleasant, in that he could now and then pass a few sunny hours in her society.

Early in December, Mrs. Ducie went up to London to stay with some friends, purposing to be away a month or two; and after her departure Philip did not find himself at The Lilacs so often. One day, however, he chanced to meet Captain Lennox in the street, who gave him a cordial invitation for the evening, to meet some other fellows who were coming.

"I expect Camberley and Lawlor and Furness," said Captain

Lennox. "You don't know Furness, I think? Married a wife with four thousand a-year, lucky dog! Come up in time for dinner."

Of course Philip accepted. Indeed, it was a rare thing for him to decline an invitation of any kind. Company pleased him, gaiety made his heart glad.

Play, that evening, began early and finished late. The stakes were higher than usual; the champagne was plentiful. The clock struck five as Philip stood at his own door, fumbling for his latch-key. He had one of his splitting headaches, and his pockets were lighter by seventy pounds than they had been eight hours previously. Seventy pounds!

All that day he lay in bed ill and was waited upon by his mother, who had no suspicion as to the real state of affairs, or that he had been abroad late. Her own poor health obliging her to retire early, rarely later than ten, she supposed Philip came in at eleven, or thereabouts. His headache went off towards dusk, but the feeling of utter wretchedness that possessed him did not go off. He was a prey to self-remorse, not perhaps for the first time in his life, but it had never stung him so bitterly as now. In the evening, when he had dressed himself, he unlocked his desk and took out his bank-book. He had not looked at it lately. After deducting, from the balance shown there, the amount lost by him at cards the previous evening, together with two or three other cheques which he had lately paid away, he found that there now remained to his credit at the bank the sum of nine hundred and thirty-five pounds. In something less than three months, he had contrived to get through two hundred and sixty-five pounds of his mother's gift—of the gift which had cost her long years of patient pinching and hoarding to scrape together. At the same rate, how long would it take him to squander the whole of it? As he asked himself this question he shut up his bank-book with a groan and felt the hot tears of shame and mortification rush into his eyes.

He was still sitting thus when a letter was brought him. It proved to be a note of invitation from Maria Kettle, written in the Vicar's name, asking Philip to dinner on the 12th of January, her father's birthday. A similar note had come for Lady Cleeve. The Vicar always kept his birthday as a little festival, at which a dozen or more of his oldest friends were welcome. The sight of Maria's writing touched and affected Philip as it might not have done at another time. His heart to-night was full of vague longings and vain regrets, and perhaps equally vain resolves. He would give up going to The Lilacs, he would never touch a card again, he would cease to seek the society of Margaret Ducie—and, he would ask Maria to promise to be his wife. At this very Vicarage dinner, opportunity being afforded, he would ask her.

He was very quiet and subdued in manner during the next few days, spending all his leisure time at home. Some two years

previously he had taken a fancy to teach himself German, but had grown tired of it in a couple of months, as he had grown tired of so many other hobbies in his time. He now hunted out his books again and began to brush up his half-forgotten knowledge. His mother was delighted at the new industry: it gave her so much more of him at home.

The evening of the twelfth arrived, and Lady Cleeve and Philip drove over to the Vicarage in a fly. The brougham of fat, good-natured Dr. Downes was just turning from the door after setting down its master. Lady Cleeve went into a room to take off her warm coverings, and Philip waited for her in the little hall.

"What, you here!" he exclaimed, as Captain Lennox entered.

"Ay. Why not?"

"I should have fancied this house would be too quiet for you," returned Philip. "There will be no Camberley—no high play here."

Captain Lennox stroked his fair moustache and looked at Philip with an amused smile. "My good sir, do you suppose I must live ever in a racket? Mr. Kettle was good enough to invite me, and I had pleasure in accepting. As to Camberley—his play goes a little further at times than I care for."

A pretty flush mounted to Maria's cheek as she met Philip; his laughing hazel eyes seemed to have a meaning in them, the pressure of his hand was more emphatic than usual. They had not seen much of each other lately. No direct words of love had yet passed between them, but there lay a sort of tacit understanding on both sides that one day they would in all probability become man and wife; needing no assurance in set phrases that they would be true to each other and wait till circumstances should be propitious. Of late, however, Philip's visits to the Vicarage had been few and far between. Rumours had reached Maria of evenings spent in the billiard-room of the Rose and Crown, and of his frequent presence at The Lilacs. When Maria thought of Margaret Ducie's attractions, her heart grew sad.

The dinner guests numbered a dozen—all pleasant people. One or two handsome girls were there, but Philip had eyes for Maria only.

"How nice she looks!" he thought; "how pure, how candid! What is it that constitutes her nameless charm? It cannot be her beauty."

No, for Maria had not very much of that. It was the goodness that shone from every line of her countenance.

Dinner over, the Vicar and a few of his guests retired to his study for a sober hand at whist, leaving the drawing-room free for music and conversation: and the evening passed on. Ten o'clock struck, and Philip's momentous words to Maria were still unspoken. At last the watched-for opportunity came. In her search for some particular piece of music, Maria went downstairs to what she still called her school-room, and Philip followed. A single jet of gas was

lighted, and she was stooping over an old canterbury when he put his arm round her waist. She had not heard his footsteps, and rose up startled.

"Oh, Philip!" she cried, and sought to push his hand away.

"Do not repulse me, Maria," he whispered, a strange earnestness in his generally laughing eyes, "I am here to tell you how truly and tenderly I love you. I am here to ask you to be my wife."

"Oh, Philip!" was all that poor Maria could reiterate in that first moment of surprise.

"You must have known all along that I loved you, and I ought perhaps to have spoken before," he continued. "But I cannot be silent longer. Tell me, my dearest, that you will be mine—my own sweet wife for ever!"

Maria's face was covered with blushes. Her eyes met Philip's in one brief loving glance, but no word did she speak. He drew her to him and kissed her tenderly twice. His arms were round her, her head rested on his shoulder, when there came a sound of footsteps outside the door. An instant later, Philip was alone. How brief a time had sufficed to seal the fate of two persons for weal or woe!

Philip felt intensely happy now that the ordeal was over—although he had never anticipated a refusal from Maria. No more gambling, no more heating visits to The Lilacs, or evenings in the billiard-room; life would be full of other and sweeter interests now. His mother would rejoice in his good fortune, and all would be *couleur de rose* in time to come.

'Twas a pity that an unwelcome thought should intrude to mar the brightness. Somehow Philip began to think of the money he had drawn from the bank.

"What a fool I was to break into the thousand pounds!" he exclaimed, his mood changing to bitterness. "I might have confined it to the extra two hundred. That would not have so much mattered, while the thousand was enough for Tiplady. But to have lessened *that* by—how much is it—sixty or seventy pounds. If I could but replace it! If we had but gold-fields over here as they have yonder," nodding his head in some vague direction, "where a man may dig up to-day what will last him to-morrow. No such luck for me. *I* can't pick any up."

A bustle in the hall—and Philip went from the room. Lady Cleeve was passing out to her fly, which waited for her, escorted to it by good Dr. Downes. She had already stayed beyond her time: Philip would walk home later. He helped to place his mother in it, wished her good-night, and returned to the rooms with the old Doctor.

At eleven o'clock the party broke up: late hours were not in fashion at the Vicarage. As Philip wished Maria good-night, he whispered that he should be with her on the morrow: and the warm

pressure of his hand and the love-light that sat in his eyes told Maria more than any words could tell.

Dr. Downes was fumbling with the sleeves and buttons of his overcoat in the hall: his own man generally did these things for him. "Let me help you, Doctor," said Philip: and buttoned it deftly.

"Thank you, lad," returned the Doctor. "Would you like a lift as far as I go?"

Philip thought he would, and got into the roomy old brougham, and chatted soberly with the old physician on the way. He got out of it when they came to the side turning that led to the Doctor's house, said good-night, and strode onwards.

Dr. Downes took snuff. A bad habit, perhaps, and one less general now than in the years gone by. He took it out of a gold box, one of great value, presented to him by a grateful patient, Lord Lytham: and this box, being rather proud of it, the old Doctor was fond of exhibiting in company. The first thing he did, arrived at his own fireside, his coat and comforter off, was to put his hand in his pocket for his snuff-box.

It was not there.

Had the Doctor found himself not to be there, he could hardly have felt more surprise. That he had not dropped it in the carriage, he knew, for he had never at all unbuttoned his overcoat: still he sent out and had it searched; and made assurance doubly sure. "Well, this is a strange thing!" ejaculated the Doctor.

"When did you have it last, sir?" asked Granby, his faithful servant of many years.

"A few minutes before I left the Vicarage," said Dr. Downes, after pausing to think. "The Vicar took a pinch with me; we were standing before the fire; and I distinctly recollect putting it back into my pocket. After that, I shook hands with one or two people, and came away."

"Suppose I send Mark to the Vicarage, sir?" suggested Granby. "He'd run there in no time: they'll not be gone to bed."

"It is sure not to be there," said the Doctor testily, as Granby came back from dispatching the boy. "How could it leave my pocket after I had put it safe in it?"

"Perhaps it did, sir—when you were getting on your coat to come away. Who knows? You are not clever at putting on that coat, sir—if you'll forgive my saying so—and turn and twist about like anything over it."

"Young Cleeve helped me. And the coat's tight and awkward. I suppose—I suppose," added Dr. Downes slowly and thoughtfully, "that Cleeve did not take the snuff-box to play me a trick?"

"Well, sir, I should not think he would play such a trick on you, though he is a gay and careless young spark."

"Oh, you think him so, do you, Granby?"

"I'm sure he is, sir," amended Granby. "He's more than that, too—a regular young spendthrift: and it's a pity to have to say it of Lady Cleeve's son. Half his time he is at the Rose and Crown playing billiards; and the t'other half he is playing cards for high stakes at Captain Lennox's, with my Lord Camberley, and other rich folk."

"Why, Granby, how the deuce do you know all this?"

"Why, sir, all the town knows it. Leastways about the time he spends in the billiard-room. And Captain Lennox's man happens to be an old acquaintance of mine, so we often have a chat together. It's James Knight, sir, who once lived with Sir Gunton Cleeve, and perhaps you may remember him."

"But—billiards, and cards, and high stakes—how does young Cleeve find the money for it all?" debated the Doctor.

"Ay, sir, that's the puzzle of it. Lady Cleeve can't give it him. Anyway, he has it; and sits at the Captain's card-table with a heap of gold and silver piled up before him."

Dr. Downes fell into a rather unpleasant reverie. He knew nothing of the money that Lady Cleeve had placed to her son's account in the bank, and he wondered where Philip's means could come from.

"Camberley and Lennox, and those rich fellows, may stake ten-pound notes if they choose to be so idiotic," cogitated the Doctor; "but such recklessness in Philip means ruin. What possesses the lad? Takes after his father, I'm afraid: *he* rushed into folly in his young days. But he pulled himself up in time."

Mark came back from the Vicarage, bringing no news of the gold snuff-box. The Vicar, much concerned, searched in the hall himself; he spoke of the pinch he had taken from the box, and he saw Dr. Downes return the box to his pocket. Dr. Downes sat looking uneasily into the dying embers of his fire as he revolved the news.

"Is it possible," he presently asked himself, "is it possible that Philip can have *stolen* the box? Stolen it to make money of for his cards and billiards?"

CHAPTER XV.

"PATCHWORK."

THE Reverend Francis Kettle and his daughter Maria sat down to their breakfast-table somewhat later than usual: the dinner-party of the previous evening had made the servants busy. The thoughts of each were pre-occupied: the Vicar's with the strange loss of Dr. Downes' gold snuff-box, of which he spoke from time to time; Maria's with the proposal of marriage made to her by Philip Cleeve: the most momentous proposal a young girl can receive. Presently Mr.

Kettle found leisure to take up a letter, which had been lying by his plate, unopened.

"Oh," said he, "it is from Mrs. Page."

Maria glanced up with a smile. "In trouble as usual, papa, with her servants?"

"Of course. And with herself, too," added the Vicar, as he read the short letter. "She wants you to go to her, Maria."

Mrs. Page was the one rich relation of the Kettle family: first cousin to the late Mrs. Kettle. She lived in Leamington, in a handsome house of her own, and with a good establishment; and she might have been as happy there as any wealthy and popular widow lady ever was yet. But, though good at heart, Mrs. Page was intensely capricious and exacting; she lived in almost perpetual hot water with her servants, and changed them every two or three months. This week, for instance, she would be rich in domestics, not lacking one in any capacity; the next week the whole lot would depart in a body, turned away, or turning themselves away, and Mrs. Page be reduced to a couple of charwomen. But her goodness of heart was undeniable; and many a Christmas Day had Mr. Kettle received from her a fifty-pound note, to be distributed by himself and Maria amongst their poor.

Every now and then she would send a peremptory summons for Maria; and the Vicar never suffered it to be disobeyed. "She is getting old now, Maria, she is nearly the only relative left of your poor mother's, and I cannot suffer you to neglect her," he would say. But he did not choose to append to this another reason, which, perhaps, weighed greatly with himself, and add—and she is rich, and will probably remember you in her will if you do not offend her.

"The servants all went off the day before yesterday, Maria; and she says she is feeling very ill, and wants you to go to her as soon as convenient," said Mr. Kettle, passing the letter to his daughter.

"But I cannot go, papa."

"Not go!"

"I do not see that I can. There is so much work at home just now."

"What work?"

"With the parish ——"

"Oh, hang the parish," put in the Vicar impulsively, and then coughed down his words. "The parish cannot expect to have you always, child."

"It is a hard winter, papa, as to work; many of the men are out of it entirely, as you know; and that entails poverty and sickness on the wives and children. I have not told you how very many are sick."

"Some of the ladies will see to them. You cannot be neglecting your own duties always, for their sakes."

"Once I get to Leamington, papa, there is no knowing when I may be allowed to return. Mrs. Page kept me six months once; I well remember that."

"And if she wishes now to keep you for twelve months, twelve you must stay."

"Oh, papa!"

"You are taking a lesson from Ella Winter's book," said the Vicar. "She did not want to leave home in the autumn; but it was all the better for her that she should. Her case, however, was different from yours, and I do not say she was wrong in wishing to remain with her uncle, so old and sick. I am not old, and I am not sick."

But Maria thought her father was sick, though not, of course, with the mortal sickness of the Squire; ay, and that, if not old, he was yet ageing. His health certainly seemed breaking a little, his eyesight was failing him; now and then his memory misled him. He displayed less interest than ever he had done in parish work, leaving nearly everything to the curate, Mr. Plympton, and Maria. His liking for old port was growing upon him, and he would sit all the evening with the bottle at his elbow, and was roused with difficulty when bed-time came. Altogether Maria would a vast deal rather not leave home; but she saw she should have to do it. Perhaps in her heart she shrank also from being away from Philip.

"I'm sure, papa, I can't think how things in the parish will get on without me," she said, as she laid down the letter. "Think what a state they were in when we returned in the summer."

The Vicar felt half offended. "Get on?" said he. "Why, bless me, shan't I and Plympton be here? As to the state they fell into during our stay abroad, was not I away myself? One would think, Maria, you were parson and clerk and everything."

Maria smiled her sweet smile. She knew her father set little store by her work in the parish, not in fact seeing the half she did, and she was glad it should be so.

"And I should not, child, let you neglect Mrs. Page in her need —your mother's own cousin—for all the parishes in the diocese. So you can write to Mrs. Page this morning, or I will write if you are busy, and fix a day to go to her."

Barely had they finished breakfast when Dr. Downes came in. The loss of the snuff-box grieved and annoyed him. Not so much for its value, not so much that it was the gift of a long-esteemed friend and patron, but for the uncertainty and suspicion attending the loss. That the box must have been cleverly filched out of his pocket he felt entirely convinced of: it could not have got out of itself. All night long between his snatches of sleep had he been pondering the matter in his mind: and he came to the uneasy conclusion that Philip Cleeve had taken it: either to play him a foolish trick, or to convert the box into money for his own use. But this latter doubt the Doctor would keep to himself and guard carefully. Mr. Kettle met the Doctor with open hand. It was not the Vicar's way to put himself out over things; but he was very considerably put out by this loss.

"I met that young blade, Philip Cleeve, in walking over here,"

observed the Doctor, as they were all three once more examining minutely every corner of the little hall—for, in a loss of this kind, we are apt to search a suspected spot over and over again. "I took the liberty of asking him whether he had purloined the box in joke when he was helping me with my great-coat on here last night. It must have been then, as I take it, that it left my pocket."

Maria was rather struck with the Doctor's tone, unpleasantly so: it bore a resentful ring. "Philip would not play such a joke as that, Dr. Downes," she rejoined. "What did he say?"

"He said nothing at first, only stared at me and asked what I meant. So I told him what I meant: that my gold snuff-box had left my pocket last night in a mysterious and unaccountable manner, and I had been hoping that he had, perhaps, taken it, to play me a trick. He blushed red with that silly blush of his, assured me that he would not play so unjustifiable a trick on me, or on anyone else, and walked off, saying he had to catch a train. So there I was, as wise as before.—And the box is not here; and it seems not to be anywhere."

"Shall you have it cried?" asked Mr. Kettle, as they returned to the breakfast-room.

"Why yes, I shall. Not that I expect any good will come of it. Rely upon it, that box has not been dropped in the road; it could not have been. It has been stolen; and the thief will send it up to London with speedy despatch and make money of it. My only hope was, and that a slight one, that Philip Cleeve had got it for a lark."

"But why Philip Cleeve?" said the Vicar, hardly understanding. "Why not any other young fellow?"

"Because Philip Cleeve put my coat on for me, here, in your hall; that is, helped me to put it on. I am sure the box was in my pocket then, it must have been; and when I unbuttoned the coat at home, the box was gone."

"You did not leave it in the carriage?"

"I did not touch the box in the carriage: I never unbuttoned my overcoat, I tell you. Philip Cleeve knows that too: he went with me as far as Market Row."

"It really does look as though Philip Cleeve had taken it—for a jest," spoke the Vicar.

"No, no, papa," said Maria. "Philip is honourable."

"Not quite so honourable perhaps as folks think him," quickly rejoined Dr. Downes. "Not that I say he did, or would do this. Philip Cleeve has his faults, I fear; he must take care they don't get ahead of him, or they may land him in shoals and quicksands. And a certain young lady of my acquaintance had better not listen to his whispering until he has proved himself worthy to be listened to," added he, as the Vicar passed temporarily into the next room, "and —and has got some better prospect of a home in view than he has at present. Take an old man's advice for once, my dear."

The stout old Doctor had turned to Maria, and was stroking her hair fondly. In his apparently jesting tone there ran an earnest warning: and Maria blushed deeply as she listened to it.

If the past night had been an uneasy one to Dr. Downes, it had also been one to Maria Kettle. Not from the same cause. Divest herself of a doubtful feeling with regard to Philip she could not. That he had no stability, that he was led away by any folly that crossed his path, and that—as Dr. Downes had but now put it—he had at present little prospect of making himself a home, a home to which he could take a wife, Maria was only too conscious of. *She* had a vast amount of common, sober sense; and in that respect was a very contrast to Philip. Maria herself would have waited for Philip for ever and a day, and never lost hope: but she, after this sleepless night was passed, had very nearly concluded that there ought to be no engagement between them; that it might be better for Philip's own sake he should not be hampered. It was rather singular that these words should have been spoken by Dr. Downes so soon afterwards to confirm her in her resolution.

In the afternoon, between three and four o'clock, when the Vicar had gone up to Heron Dyke, Philip made his appearance at the Vicarage. He was sent away on business for the office early in the day, and had but now got back. Maria met him with a pretty blush and held out her hand, as the servant closed the door; but Philip drew her to him and kissed her, sat down by her side on the sofa, and stole his arm round her waist. Maria gently put it away.

"Philip," she said, "we were both, I fear, thoughtlessly rash last night."

"In what way?" asked Philip, possessing himself of her hand, as it seemed he was not to have her waist.

"Oh—you know. In what you said and I—I listened to. I think we must wait a little, Philip: another year, or so. It will be best."

"Wait for what? What is running in your head, Maria?"

"Until our prospects shall be a little more assured. Forgive me, Philip, but I mean it; I am quite serious. In a year's time from this, if you so will it, we can speak of it again."

"Do you mean to say there must be no engagement between us?" fired Philip.

"There had better not be. Neither of us at present has any chance of carrying it out."

"Oh," commented Philip, who was getting angry. "Perhaps you will point out what you do mean, Maria. I can see no meaning in it."

The tears rose to Maria's eyes. "Philip dear, don't be vexed with me: I speak for your sake more than for my own. At present you have no home to take a wife to, no expectation of making one ——"

"But I have," interrupted Philip. "Old Tiplady intends to take me into partnership."

"Well—I hope he will: but still that lies in the future. Your mother, I feel sure, would not like to see you hamper yourself with a wife until you are quite justified in doing it. And then, on my side—how can I marry? It would not be well possible for me to leave papa. And all the parish duties that I have made mine; the visiting and the schools ——" Maria broke down with a sob.

"That young fop, Plympton, ought to take these duties," returned Philip with a touch of petulance. "What's he good for? Garden parties, and croquet, and flirting with the ladies. That's what he thinks of, rather than of looking after the poor wretches who live and die in the back lanes and alleys of the town."

"He is young," said Maria gently. "Wisdom will come with years."

"One would think that you were *old*, to hear you talk, Maria."

"I think I am; old in experience. And so, Philip," sighed Maria, returning to the point, "let it be that there exists no actual engagement between us. I shall be the same to you that I have been; the same always; and when things look brighter for you and for me ——"

His ill-humour had passed away like mist in the sunshine, and he sealed the bargain with a kiss. "Be assured of one thing, my darling," he whispered: "we shall not have to wait long if it depends on me. I will spare no pains, no exertion to get on, to offer you a home that all the world might approve, and to be in every respect what you would have me be."

Maria told him then of the probability that she should have to go to Leamington for an indefinite period, should have to depart in the course of a very few days. Philip did not receive the news graciously, and relieved his mind by calling Mrs. Page selfish.

"I can't stay longer," he said, getting up. "That precious office claims me; old Best does not know I am back yet.——Here's a visitor for you in my stead, Maria," he broke off, as they heard one being admitted.

It was Captain Lennox: who was calling to enquire about the health of the Vicar and Maria after the previous evening's dissipation. Philip was going; and they all three stood together in the drawing-room for a minute or two.

"By the way, talking of last night, what is this tale about old Dr. Downes losing his gold snuff-box?" asked Captain Lennox. "The people at the library told me they had heard it cried, as I came by just now."

"So he has lost it," said Philip. "That is, he thinks he has. I daresay he has put it in some place or other himself, and will find it before the day's over."

"Did he miss it here?"

"No; not till he got home. And he had the impudence to ask me this morning whether I had *taken* it, because I helped to button his coat," added Philip.

Captain Lennox looked at Philip, then at Maria, then at Philip again. "He asked you whether you had taken it!" exclaimed the Captain.

"Taken it for a lark. As if I would do such a thing! It's true I buttoned his coat for him, but I never saw or felt the box."

"I do not quite understand yet," said Captain Lennox.

"It seems that old Downes, just before he left, had his box out, handing it about for people to take pinches out of it. The Vicar took a pinch."

"I saw that," interrupted Captain Lennox. "They were standing by the fire. Two or three of us were round them. Old Miss Parraway was, for one, I remember; I was talking with her."

"Well," rather ungraciously went on Philip, impatient at the interruption, "the Doctor took his leave close upon that. I took mine, and I found him in the hall here, awkwardly fumbling with his overcoat. I helped him to get it on, and he gave me a lift in his brougham as far as my way went."

"And when he got home he missed the box," added Maria, concluding the story, as Philip stopped. "It is a sad loss—and so very strange where the box can be, and how it can have gone."

"Yes, it is strange—but I did not thank him for asking me whether I had taken it; there was a tone in his voice which seemed to imply a suspicion that I had—and not as a joke."

"And did you?" said Captain Lennox.

Philip, who had been turning to the door after his last speech, wheeled round to face the Captain. "Did I *what?*"

"Take it for a joke?"

"No, of course I did not. Good-bye, Maria."

"Here, you need not be so hasty, old fellow," laughed Captain Lennox, following Philip out. "You are as cranky as can be to-day. Of course you did not steal the box, Cleeve; and of course I am not likely to think it. If I did, I should say so to your face," added the Captain, his light laugh deepening. "But—I say—do you know what this puts me in mind of?"

"No. What?"

"Of Mrs. Carlyon's jewels. They disappeared in the same mysterious way."

Philip had the outer door open, when at this moment the Vicar turned in at the entrance gate. He shook hands cordially with them both.

"I have been up to Heron Dyke," spoke he; "and have met with the usual luck—non-admittance to the Squire. I must say I think they might let him see me."

"It seems to me, sir, that they let him see nobody: for my part,

I have grown tired of calling," said the Captain. "Still, in your favour, his spiritual adviser, an exception might well be made."

"I ventured to say as much to surly old Aaron this afternoon," returned Mr. Kettle. "He refused at first point-blank, saying it was one of his master's bad days, and he was sure he would not see me. I persevered; bidding him take a message for me to the Squire; so he showed me into one of the dull old rooms—all the blinds down—while he took it in."

"And were you admitted, sir?" interposed impatient Philip, interested in the story, yet anxious to be gone.

"No, I was not, Philip. Aaron came back in a few minutes, bringing me the Squire's message of refusal. He would have liked to see me; very much; but he was in truth too poorly for it to-day; it was one of his weak days, and Jago had absolutely forbidden him to speak even to the attendants—and he sent his affectionate regards to me. So I came away: having made a fruitless errand, as usual."

"If Jago's grand curative treatment consists in shutting up the Squire from the sight of all his friends, the less he boasts of it the better," cried Philip, as he marched away. "Tiplady remarked to me the other day that he thought there must be something very queer going on up there," concluded he, turning round at the gate to say it.

Maria Kettle departed for Leamington, and the time passed on. Philip Cleeve attended well to his duties, seeming anxious to make up for past escapades. So far as The Lilacs went, no temptations assailed him, for the place was empty, Captain Lennox having joined his sister in London. No tidings could be heard of the gold snuff-box. Dr. Downes had had it cried and advertised; but without result. It might be that he had his own opinion about the loss; or it might be that he had not. During a little private conversation with Lady Cleeve, touching her state of health, she chanced to mention that she hoped Philip's future was pretty well assured. Mr. Tiplady meant to take him into partnership, and she had herself placed twelve hundred pounds to Philip's account at the bank.

"That's where the young scapegrace has drawn his money from then, for his cards and his dice, and what not," quoth the Doctor to himself. "I hope with all my heart I was mistaken—but where the dickens can the box have gone to?"

The Doctor was fain to give the box up as a bad job. He told all his friends that he should never find it again, and the less said about it the better.

In February Philip had a pleasant change. Mr. Tiplady despatched him to Norwich, to superintend certain improvements in one of its public buildings. Philip, before starting, spoke a word to the architect of the anticipated partnership; but Mr. Tiplady cut him short with a single sentence. "Time enough to talk of that, young sir."

When Philip returned from Norwich, after his few weeks' stay there, during which he had done his best and given unlimited satisfaction, he heard that Captain Lennox and Mrs. Ducie were at The Lilacs—and to Philip the town seemed to look all the brighter for their presence.

In spite of his former good resolution, he went over to call on Mrs. Ducie, went twice, neither of the times finding her at home. About this time Philip was surprised and gratified by receiving a note of invitation from Lord Camberley to attend a concert and ball at Camberley Park. Philip took the note to his mother. "My dear boy, you must go by all means," said Lady Cleeve. "This is an invitation which may lead to—to pleasant things. I am glad to find that they have not forgotten you are the son of Sir Gunton Cleeve. You have as good blood in your veins as anyone who will be there. What a pity, for your sake, dear, that we cannot live in the style we ought—to which you were born."

So Philip went to the concert and ball. Lord Camberley vouchsafed him a couple of fingers and "how d'ye do," and introduced him to his aunt, the Hon. Mrs. Featherstone. Philip sat through the concert without speaking to anybody. He was glad when it came to an end, and he made his way to the ball-room. There he met several people with whom he was, more or less, acquainted. Presently his eye caught that of Mrs. Ducie, who was sitting somewhat apart from the general crush. She beckoned him to her side and held out her hand with a frank smile.

"What a truant you are. What have you been doing with yourself all this long time?" she asked, as she made room for him to sit beside her.

Philip told her, his laughing eyes bending in admiration on her face, that he had been staying for some weeks at Norwich, and that he had twice called at The Lilacs since his return, but had not found her at home. She listened in her pretty, engaging, attentive manner.

"Do you dance?" she asked him, as another set was forming.

"I do not care to—unless you will stand up with me," he replied.

"I shall not dance to-night. Lord Camberley came up to ask me, but I said no: I told him I had sprained my foot. I do not much like Lord Camberley," she added confidentially—and Philip felt wonderfully flattered at the confidence. "I think he is random—and he is so fond of playing for high stakes at cards. I told Ferdinand the other day that I should object, were I in his place; but, as he said, it did not often happen. Ferdinand, with his income, can afford a loss occasionally; but everybody is not so fortunate."

Philip thought she looked at him with a kindly meaning as she spoke; he felt sure she held an especial interest in him, and a blush, bright and ingenuous as a schoolgirl's, rose to his face.

He sat by Mrs. Ducie a great part of the evening and took her

down to supper. Captain Lennox came up several times, and they both invited him for the following Friday evening.

When Friday evening came, and Philip found himself again at The Lilacs and knocked at the well-remembered door, it seemed to him as if the intervening weeks and all that had happened to him since his last visit were nothing more substantial than a dream.

Two or three gentlemen were at the cottage this evening whom he had not met before, but to whom he was now introduced. After a light and elegantly served supper came cards and champagne. To-night, however, Philip did not play. He read poetry to Mrs. Ducie in a little boudoir that opened out of the drawing-room. So were woven again the bonds which at one time he believed were broken for ever. There was a strange, subtle fascination about this woman which held him almost as it were against his will. She was gracious and frank towards him, but that was all. She was gracious and frank to every gentleman who visited at the cottage. There was nothing in her manner towards Philip which would allow of his flattering himself that he was a greater favourite than anyone else whom he met there: though at moments he did think she held him in interest. He certainly did not love her—his heart was given to Maria—but Margaret Ducie held him by an invisible chain which he was too weak to break.

That Friday evening was but the precursor of many other evenings at The Lilacs: for all the old glamour had come back over Philip. Maria was away, and the cottage was a very pleasant place. Sometimes he played cards, sometimes he did not; sometimes he won a little money, not unfrequently he lost what for him was a considerable sum. Now and then it almost seemed as if Mrs. Ducie, compassionating his youth and inexperience, drew him away of set purpose from the card table. Be that as it may, when April came in, and Philip looked into the state of his banking account, he found to his dismay that in the course of the past few weeks he had lost upwards of a hundred pounds. How could he redeem it?

"Now's your time if you want to make a cool hundred or two," said Lennox to him a day or two later.

Philip pricked up his ears. "Who does not want to make a cool hundred or two? Only show me how."

"The thing lies in a nutshell. Back Patchwork."

"Eh?" queried Philip, who knew little more about racing and sporting matters than he did of the mysteries of Eleusis.

"Back Patchwork," reiterated the Captain with emphasis. "I am quite aware that he's not a general favourite: the odds were ten to one against him last night: there's Trumpeter and Clansman, and one or two other horses that stand before him in public estimation. But take no notice of that. Camberley and I have got the tip, no matter how, and you may rely upon it that we know pretty well what we are about. Both of us are going to lay heavily on the

horse, and if you have a few spare sovereigns you can't do better than follow our example."

The Captain spoke of an early Spring Meeting at Newmarket; and this particular race in it was exciting some interest at Nullington, for reasons which need not be detailed here. Philip, desperately anxious to replenish his diminished coffers, took the bait, though in a cautious manner, and betted twenty pounds on Patchwork. If the horse won, and Philip gained the odds, he would pocket two hundred pounds.

He grew anxious. Everybody said that either Trumpeter or Clansman would win; Patchwork was scoffed at as an outsider. Philip began to think of his twenty pounds as so much good money thrown away.

At length the day of the race arrived, and Philip awaited the result with a feverish anxiety to which his young life had hitherto been a stranger. It's true, if he lost, twenty pounds would not ruin him; but, if he won, two hundred would set him up.

At length the looked-for news reached Nullington by telegram, and a slip of paper was pasted to the window of the Rose and Crown, on which was written in large characters:—Patchwork 1.—Clansman 2.—Trumpeter 3.

Philip Cleeve fell back out of the crowd gathered there, with a great gasp of relief.

Three days later Captain Lennox placed in his hands two hundred pounds in crisp Bank of England notes. "If you had only taken my advice," he said, "and ventured fifty pounds instead of twenty, what a much richer man you would have been to-day!"

(To be continued.)

VERENA FONTAINE'S REBELLION.

SPRING sunshine, bright and warm to-day, lay on Timberdale. Herbert Tanerton, looking sick and ill, sat on a bench on the front lawn, holding an argument with his wife, shielded from outside gazers by the clump of laurel-trees. We used to say the Rector's illnesses were all fancy and temper; but it seemed to be rather more than that now. Worse tempered he was than ever; Jack's misfortunes and Jack's conduct annoyed him. During the past winter Jack had taken some employment at the Liverpool Docks, in connection with the Messrs. Freeman's ships. Goodness knew of what description it was, Herbert would say, turning up his nose.

A day or two ago Jack made his appearance again at the Rectory; had swooped down upon it without warning or ceremony, just as he had in the autumn. Herbert did not approve of that. He approved still less of the object which had brought Jack at all. Jack was tired of the Liverpool Docks; the work he had to do was not congenial to him; and he had now come to Timberdale to ask Robert Ashton to make him his bailiff. Not being able to take a farm on his own account, Jack thought the next best thing would be to take the management of one. Robert Ashton would be parting with his bailiff at midsummer, and Jack would like to drop into the post. Anything much less congenial to the Rector's notions, Jack could hardly have pitched upon.

"I can see what it is—Jack is going to be a thorn in my side for ever," the Rector was remarking to his wife, who sat near him, doing some useful work. "He never had any idea of the fitness of things. A bailiff, now!—a servant!"

"I wish you would let him take a farm, Herbert—lend him the money to stock one."

"I know you do; you have said so before."

Grace sighed. But when she had it on her conscience to say a thing she said it.

"Herbert, you know—you know I have never thought it fair that we should enjoy all the income we do; and ——"

"What do you mean by 'fair'?" interrupted Herbert. "I only enjoy my own."

"Legally it is yours. Rightly, a large portion of it ought to be Jack's. It does not do us any good, Herbert, this superfluous income; you only put it by. It does not in the slightest degree add to our enjoyment of life."

"Do be quiet, Grace—unless you can talk sense. Jack will get no money from me. He ought to be at sea. What right had he to

give it up? The *Rose of Delhi* is expected back now: let him take her again."

"You know why he will not, Herbert. And he must do something for a living. I wish you would not object to his engaging himself to Robert Ashton. If——"

"Why don't you wish anything else that's lowering and degrading? You are as devoid of common sense as he!" retorted the parson, walking away in a fume.

Matters were in this state when we got back to Crabb Cot; to stop at it for a longer or a shorter period as fate and the painters at Dyke Manor would allow. Jack urging Robert Ashton to promise him the bailiff's post — vacant the next midsummer; Herbert strenuously objecting to it; and Robert Ashton in a state of dilemma between the two. He would have liked well enough to engage John Tanerton; but he did not like to defy the Rector. When the Squire heard this later, his opinion vacillated, according to custom: now leaning to Herbert's side, now to Jack's. And the Fontaines, we found, were in all the bustle of house-moving. Their own house, Oxlip Grange, being at length ready for them, they were quitting Maythorn Bank.

"Goodness bless me!" cried the Squire, coming in at dusk from a stroll he had taken the evening of our arrival. "I never got such a turn in my life."

"What has given it you, sir?"

"What has given it me, Johnny? why, Sir Dace Fontaine. I never saw any man so changed," he went on, rubbing up his hair. "He looks like a ghost, more than a man."

"Is he ill?"

"He must be ill. Sauntering down that narrow lane by Maythorn Bank, I came upon a tall something mooning along like a walking shadow. I might have taken it for a shadow, but that it lifted its bent head, and threw its staring eyes straight into mine—and I protest that a shadowy sensation crept over myself when I recognised it for Fontaine. You never saw a face so gloomy and wan. How long is it since we saw him, Johnny?"

"About nine months I think, sir."

"The man must be suffering from a wasting complaint, or else he has some secret care that's fretting him to fiddle-strings. Mark my words, all of you, it is one or the other."

"Dear me!" put in Mrs. Todhetley, full of pity. "I always thought him a gloomy man. Did you ask him whether he was ill?"

"Not I," said the Pater: "he gave me no opportunity. Had I been a sheriff's officer with a writ in my hand he could hardly have turned off shorter. They had moved into the other house that day, he muttered, and he must lock up Maythorn Bank and be after them."

This account of Sir Dace was in a measure cleared up the next

morning. Who should come in after breakfast but the surgeon, Cole. Talking of this and that, Sir Dace Fontaine's name came up.

"I am on my way now to Sir Dace; to the new place," cried Cole. "They went into it yesterday. Might have gone in a month ago, but Sir Dace made no move to do it. He seems to have no heart left to do anything; neither heart nor energy."

"I knew he was ill," cried the Squire. "No mistaking that. And now, Cole, what is it that's the matter with him?"

"He shows symptoms of a very serious inward complaint," gravely answered Cole. "A complaint that, if it really does set in, must prove fatal. We have some hopes yet that we shall ward it off. Sir Dace does not think we shall, and is in a rare fright about himself."

"A fright, is he! That's it, then."

"Never saw any man in such a fright before," went on Cole. "Says he's going to die—and he does not want to die."

"I said last night the man was like a walking shadow. And there's a kind of scare in his face."

Cole nodded. "Two or three weeks ago I got a note from him, asking me to call. I found him something like a shadow, as you observe, Squire. The cold weather had kept him indoors, and I had not chanced to see him for some weeks. When Sir Dace told me his symptoms, I suppose I looked grave. Combined with his wasted appearance, they unpleasantly impressed me, and he took alarm. 'The truth,' he said, in his arbitrary way: 'tell me the truth; only that. Conceal nothing.' Well, when a patient adjures me in a solemn manner to tell the truth, I deem it my duty to do so," added Cole, looking up.

"Go on, Cole," cried the Squire, nodding approval.

"I told him the truth, softening it in a degree—that I did not altogether like some of the symptoms, but that I hoped, with skill and care, to get him round again. The same day he sent for Darbyshire of Timberdale, saying we must attend him conjointly, for two heads were better than one. Two days later he sent for somebody else—no other than Mr. Ben Rymer."

We all screamed out in surprise. "Ben Rymer!"

"Ay," said Cole, "Ben Rymer. Ben has got through and is a surgeon now, like the rest of us. And, upon my word, I believe the fellow has his profession thoroughly in hand. He will make a name in the world, the chances for it being afforded him, unless I am mistaken."

Something like moisture stood in the Squire's good old eyes. "If his father, poor Rymer, had but lived to see it!" he softly said. "Anxiety, touching Ben, killed him."

"So we three doctors make a pilgrimage to Sir Dace regularly every day; sometimes together, sometimes apart," added Cole.

"And, of the three of us, I believe the patient likes young Rymer best—has most confidence in him."

"Shall you cure him?"

"Well, we do not yet give up hope. If the disease does set in, it will ——"

"What?"

"Run its course quickly."

"An instant yet, Cole," cried the Squire, stopping the surgeon as he was turning away. "You have told us nothing. How does the parish get on?—and the people? How is Letsom?—and Crabb generally? Tanerton—how is he?—and Timberdale? Coming here fresh, we are thirsting for news."

Cole laughed. He knew the Pater liked gossip as much as any old woman: and the reader must understand that, as yet, we had not heard any, having reached Crabb Cot late the previous afternoon.

"There is no particular news, Squire," said he. "Letsom is well; so is Crabb. Herbert Tanerton's not well. He is in a crusty way over Jack."

"He is always in a way over something. Where is Jack?"

"Jack's here, at the Rectory; just come to it. Robert Ashton's bailiff is about to take a farm on his own account, and Jack came rushing over from Liverpool to apply for the post."

Tod, who had been too much occupied with his fishing flies to take much heed before, set up a shrill whistle at this. "How will the parson like that?" he asked.

"The parson does not like it at all. Whether he will succeed in preventing it, is another matter," concluded Cole. And, with that, he made his escape.

Close upon the surgeon's departure, Colonel Letsom came in; he had heard of our arrival. It was a pity, he said, the two brothers should be at variance. Jack wanted the post—he must make a living somehow; and the Rector was in a way over it; not quite mad, but next door to it; Ashton of course not knowing what to do between them. From that subject, he began to speak of the Fontaines.

A West Indian planter, one George Bazalgette, had been over on a visit, he said, and had spent Christmas at Maythorn Bank; his object being to induce Verena to accept him as her husband. Verena would not listen to him, and he wasted his eloquence in vain. She made no hesitation in avowing to him that her affections were buried in the grave of Edward Pym.

"Fontaine told me confidentially in London that he intended she *should* have Bazalgette," remarked the Squire. "It was the evening we went looking for her at that wax-work place."

"Ay; but Fontaine is changed," returned the Colonel: "all his old domineering ways are gone out of him. When Bazalgette was over here, he did not attempt even to persuade her: she must take

her own course, he said. So poor Bazalgette went back as he came—wifeless. It was a pity."

"Why?"

"Because this George Bazalgette was a nice fellow," replied Colonel Letsom. "An open-hearted, fine-looking, generous man, and desperately in love with her. Miss Verena will not readily find his compeer in a summer day's march."

"As old as Adam, I suppose, Colonel," interjected Tod.

"Yes—if you choose to put Adam's age down at three or four and thirty," laughed the Colonel, as he took his leave.

To wait many hours, once she was at Crabb, without laying in a stock of those delectable "family pills," invented by the late Thomas Rymer, would have been quite beyond the philosophy of Mrs. Todhetley. That first morning, not ten minutes after Colonel Letsom left us, taking the Squire with him, she despatched me to Timberdale for a big box of them. Tod would not come: said he had his flies to see to.

Dashing through the ravine and out on the field beyond it, I came upon Jack Tanerton. Good old Jack! The Squire had said Sir Dace was changed: I saw that Jack was. He looked taller and thinner, and the once beaming face had care upon it.

"Where are you bound for, Jack?"

"Not for any place in particular. Just sauntering about."

"Walk my way, then. I am going to Rymer's."

"It is such nonsense," cried Jack, speaking of his brother, after we had plunged a bit into affairs. "Calling it derogatory, and all the rest of it! I could be just as much of a gentleman as Ashton's bailiff as I am now. Everybody knows me. He gives a good salary, and there's a pretty house; and I have also my own small income. Alice and I and the little ones should be as happy as the day's long. If I give in to Herbert and don't take it, I don't see what I am to turn to."

"But, Jack, why do you give up the sea?" I asked. And Jack told me what he had told others: he should never take command again until he was a free man.

"Don't you think you are letting that past matter hold too great an influence over you?" I presently said. "You must be conscious of your own innocence—and yet you seem as sad and subdued as though you were guilty!"

"I am subdued because other people think me guilty!" he answered. "Changed? I am. It is that which has changed me; not the calamity itself."

"Jack, were I you, I should stand up in the face and eyes of all the world, and say to them, 'Before God, I did not kill Pym.' People would believe you then. But you don't do it."

"I have my reasons for not doing it, Johnny Ludlow. God knows what they are; He knows all things. I daresay I may be set right with the world in time: though I don't see how it is to be done."

A smart young man, a new assistant, was behind the counter at Ben Rymer's, and served me with the pills. Coming out, box in hand, we met Ben himself. I hardly knew him, he was so spruce. His fiery hair and whiskers were trimmed down to neatness and looked of a more reasonable colour; his red-brown beard was certainly handsome, and his clothes were well cut.

"Why, he has grown into a dandy, Jack," I said, after we had stood a minute or two, talking with the surgeon.

"Yes," said Jack, "he is going in for the proprieties of life now. Ben may make a gentleman yet—and a good man to boot."

That same afternoon, it chanced that the Squire met Ben Rymer. Striding along in his powerful fashion, Ben came full tilt round the sharp corner that makes the turning to the Islip Road, and nearly ran over the Pater. Ben had been to Oxlip Grange.

"So, sir," cried the Pater, stopping him, "I hear you are in practice now, and intend to become a respectable man. It's time you did."

"Ay, at last," replied Ben good-humouredly. "It is a long lane, Squire, that has no turning."

"Don't you lapse back again, Mr. Ben."

"Not if I know it, sir. I hope I shall not."

"It was anxiety on your score, you know, that troubled your good father's mind in dying."

"If it did not bring his death on," readily conceded Ben, his light tone changing. "I know it all, Squire—and have felt it."

"Look here," cried the Squire, catching at Ben's button-hole, which had a lovely lily-of-the-valley in it, "there was nothing on earth your poor patient father prayed for so earnestly as for your welfare; that you might be saved for time and eternity. Now I don't believe such prayers are ever lost. So you will be helped on your way if you bear steadfastly onwards."

Giving the young man's hand a wring, the Squire turned off on his way. In half a minute he was back again.

"Hey, Mr. Benjamin!—here. How is Sir Dace Fontaine? I suppose you have just left him?"

So Ben had to come back at the call. To the Pater's surprise he saw his eyes were moist.

"He is worse, sir, to-day; palpably worse."

"Will he get over it?"

Ben gave his head an emphatic shake, which somehow belied his words: "Cole and Darbyshire think there is hope yet, Squire."

"And you do not; that's evident. Well, good-day."

II.

The next move in this veritable drama was the appearance of Alice Tanerton and her six-months-old baby at Timberdale. Looking upon

the Rectory as almost her home—it had been Jack's for many years of his life—Alice came to it without the ceremony of invitation: the object of her coming now being to strive to induce Herbert to let her husband engage himself to Robert Ashton. And this visit of Alice's was destined to bring about a most extraordinary event.

One Wednesday evening when Jack and his wife were dining with us—and that troublesome baby, which Alice could not, as it seemed, stir abroad without, was in the nursery squealing—Alice chanced to say that she had to go to Islip the following day, her mother having charged her to see John Paul the lawyer, concerning a little property that she, Aunt Dean, held in Crabb. It would be a tremendously long walk for Alice from Timberdale, especially as she was not looking strong, and Mrs. Todhetley proposed that I should drive her over in the pony-carriage: which Alice jumped at.

Accordingly, the next morning, which was warm and bright, I took the pony-carriage to the Rectory, picked up Alice, and then drove back towards Islip. As we passed Oxlip Grange, which lay in our way, Sir Dace Fontaine was outside in the road, slowly pacing the side-path. I thought I had never seen a man look so ill: so *down* and gloomy. He raised his eyes, as we came up, to give me a nod. I was nodding back again, when Alice screamed out and startled me. She started the pony too, which sprang on at a tangent.

"Johnny! Johnny Ludlow!" she gasped, her face whiter than death and her lips trembling like an aspen leaf, "did you see that man? Did you see him?"

"Yes. I was nodding to him. What is the matter?"

"It was the man I saw in my dream: the man who had committed the murder in it."

I stared at her, wondering whether she had lost her wits.

"Do you remember the description I gave of that man?" she continued, in excitement. "*I* do. I wrote it down at the time, and Mr. Todhetley holds it, sealed up. Every word, every particular is in my memory now, as I saw him in my dream. 'A tall, evil-looking, dark man in a long brown coat, who walked with his eyes fixed on the ground.' I tell you, Johnny Ludlow, *that is the man.*"

Her vehemence infected me. I looked round after Sir Dace. He was turning this way now. Certainly the description seemed like enough. His countenance just now did look an evil one; and he was tall and he was dark, and he wore a long brown coat this morning, nearly reaching to his heels, and his eyes were fixed on the ground as he walked.

"But what if his looks do tally with the man you saw in your dream, Alice? What of it?"

"What of it!" she echoed, vehemently. "*What of it!* Why, don't you see, Johnny Ludlow? This man must have killed Edward Pym."

"Hush, Alice! It is impossible. This is Sir Dace Fontaine."

"I do not care who he is," was her impulsive retort. "As surely as that Heaven is above us, Edward Pym got his death at the hand of this man. My dream revealed it to me."

I might as well have tried to stem a torrent as to argue with her; so I drove on and held my tongue. Arrived at the office of Paul and Chandler, I following her in, leaving a boy with the pony outside. Alice pounced upon old Paul with the assertion: Sir Dace Fontaine was the evil and guilty man she had seen in her dream. Considering that Paul was a sort of cousin to Sir Dace's late wife, this was pretty well. Old Paul stared at her as I had done. Her cheeks were hectic, her eyes wildly earnest. She recalled to the lawyer's memory the dream she had related to him; she asserted in the most unqualified manner that Dace Fontaine was guilty. Tom Chandler, who was old Paul's partner and had married his daughter Emma, came into the room in the middle of it, and took his share of staring.

"It must be investigated," said Alice to them. "Will you undertake it?"

"My dear young lady, one cannot act upon a fancy—a dream," cried old Paul: and there was a curious sound of compassionate pity in his voice, which betrayed to Alice the gratifying fact that he was regarding her as a monomaniac.

"If you will not act, others will," she concluded at last, after exhausting her arguments in vain. And she came away with me in resentment, having totally forgotten all about her mother's business.

To Crabb Cot then—she *would* go—to take counsel with the Squire. He told her to her face she was worse than a lunatic to suspect Sir Dace; and he would hardly get out the sealed packet at all. It was opened at last, and the dream, as written down in it by herself at the time, read.

"John Tanerton, my husband, was going to sea in command," it began. "He came to me the morning of the day they were to sail, looking very patient, pale and sorrowful: more so than anyone, I think, could look in life. He and I seemed to have had some estrangement the previous night that was not remembered by either of us now, and I, for one, repented of it. Somebody was murdered (though I could not tell how this had been revealed to me), some man; Jack was suspected by all people, but they could not bring it home to him. We were in some strange town; strangers in it; though I, as it seemed to me, had been in it once, many years before. All this while, Jack was standing before me in his sadness and sorrow, mutely appealing to me, as it seemed, to clear him. Everybody was talking of it and glancing at us askance, everybody shunned us, and we were in cruel distress. Suddenly I remembered that when I was in the town before, the man now murdered had had a bitter quarrel with another man, a gentleman of note in the town; and a conviction came over me, powerful as a revelation, that it was

he who had now committed the murder. I left Jack, and told this to someone connected with the ship, its owner, I think. He laughed at the words, saying that the gentleman I would accuse was of high authority in the town, one of its first magnates. That he had done it, however high he might be, I felt perfectly certain; but nobody would listen to me, nobody would heed so improbable a tale: and, in the trouble this brought me, I awoke. *Such* trouble! Nothing like it could be felt in real life.

"That was dream the first.

"I lay awake for some little time thinking of it, and then went to sleep again: and this was dream the second.

"The dream seemed to recommence from where it had left off. It was afternoon. I was in a large open carriage, going through the streets of the town, the ship's owner (as I say I think he was) sitting beside me. In passing over a bridge we saw two gentlemen walking towards us arm-in-arm on the foot-path, one of them an officer in a dusky old red uniform and cocked hat, the other a tall, evil-looking, dark man, who wore a long brown coat and kept his eyes on the ground. Though I had never seen him in my life before, I *knew* it was the guilty man; he had killed the other, committed the crime in secret: but ere I could speak, he who was sitting with me said, 'There's the gentleman you would have accused this morning. He stands before everybody else in the town. Fancy your accusing *him* of such a thing!' It seemed to me that I did not answer, could not answer for the pain. That he was guilty I knew, and not Jack, but I had no means of bringing it home to him. He and the man in uniform walked on in their secure immunity, and I went on in the carriage in my pain. The pain awoke me.

"And now it only remains for me to declare that I have set down this singular dream truthfully, word for word; and I shall seal it up and keep it. It may be of use if any trouble falls upon Jack, as the dream seems to foretell—and of some trouble in store for him he has already felt the shadow. So strangely vivid a dream, and the intense pain it brought and leaves with me, can hardly have visited me for nothing.—ALICE TANERTON."

That was all the paper said. The Squire poring his good old spectacles over it, shook his head as Alice pointed out the description of the guilty man, how exactly it tallied with the appearance of Sir Dace Fontaine; but he only repeated Paul the lawyer's words, "One cannot act upon a dream."

"It was Sir Dace; it was Sir Dace," reiterated Alice, clasping her hands piteously. "I am as sure of it as that I hope to go to Heaven." And I drove her home in the belief.

There ensued a commotion. Not a commotion to be told to the parish, but a private one amidst ourselves. I never saw a woman in such a fever of excitement as Alice Tanerton was in from that day, or anyone take up a matter so warmly.

Captain Tanerton did not adopt her views. He shook his head, and said Sir Dace it *could not* have been. Sir Dace was at his house in the Marylebone Road at the very hour the calamity happened off Tower Hill. I followed suit, bearing out Jack's word. Was I not at the Marylebone Road that evening myself, playing chess with Coralie?—and was not Sir Dace shut up in his library all the time, and never came out of it?

Alice listened, and looked puzzled to death. But she held to her own opinion. And when a fit of desperate obstinacy takes possession of a woman without rhyme or reason, you cannot shake it. As good try to argue with the whistling wind. She did not pretend to see how it could have been, she said, but Sir Dace was guilty. And she haunted Paul and Chandler's office at Islip, praying them to take the matter up.

At length, to soothe her, and perhaps to prevent her carrying it elsewhere, they promised they would. And of course they had to make some show of doing it.

One evening Tom Chandler came to Crabb Cot and asked to see me alone. "I want you to tell me all the particulars you remember of that fatal night," he began, when I went to him in the Squire's little room. "I have taken down Captain Tanerton's testimony, and I must have yours, Johnny."

"But, are you going to stir in it?"

"We must do something, I suppose. Paul thinks so. I am going to London to-morrow on other matters, and shall use the opportunity to make an enquiry or two. It is rather a strange piece of business altogether," added Mr. Chandler, as he took his place at the table and drew the inkstand towards him. "John Tanerton is innocent. I feel sure of that."

"How strongly Mrs. Tanerton has taken it up!"

"Pretty well for that," answered Tom Chandler, a smile on his good-natured face. "She told us yesterday in the office that it must be the consciousness of guilt which has worried Sir Dace to a skeleton. Now then, we'll begin."

He dotted down my answers to his questions, also what I voluntarily added. Then he took a sheet of paper from his pocket, closely written upon, and compared its statements—they were Tanerton's—with mine. Putting his finger on the paper to mark a place, he looked at me.

"Did Sir Dace speak of Pym or of Captain Tanerton that night, when you were playing chess with Miss Fontaine?"

"Sir Dace did not come into the drawing-room. He had left the dinner-table in a huff to shut himself up in his library, Miss Fontaine said; and he stayed in it."

"Then you did not see Sir Dace at all that night?"

"Oh yes, later—when Captain Tanerton and young Saxby came up to tell him of the death. We then all went down to Ship Street together. You have taken that down."

"True," said Chandler. "Well, I cannot make much out of it as it stands," he concluded, folding the papers and putting them in his pocket-book. "What do you say is the number of the house in the Marylebone Road?"

I told him, and he went away, wishing he could accept my offer of staying to drink tea with us.

"Look here, Chandler," I said to him at the front door: "why don't you take down Sir Dace Fontaine's evidence, as well as mine and Tanerton's?"

"I have done it," he answered. "I was with Sir Dace to-day. Mrs. Tanerton's suspicions are of course—absurd," he added, making a pause, as if at a loss for a suitable word; "but for her peace of mind, poor lady, we would like to pitch upon the right individual if we can. And as yet he seems to be a myth."

The good ship, *Rose of Delhi*, came gaily into port, and took up her berth in St. Katharine's Docks as before; for she had been chartered for London. Her owners, the Freemans, wrote at once from Liverpool to Captain Tanerton, begging him to resume command. Jack wrote back, and declined.

How is it that whispers get about? Do the birds in the air carry them?—or the winds of Heaven? In some cases it seems impossible that anything else can have done it. Paul and Chandler, John Tanerton and his wife, the Squire and myself: we were the only people cognisant of the new suspicion that Alice was striving to cast on Sir Dace; one and all of us had kept silent lips: and yet, the rumour got abroad. Sir Dace Fontaine was accused of knowing more about Pym's death than he ought to know, and Tom Chandler was in London for the purpose of investigating it. This might not have mattered very much for ordinary ears, but it reached those of Sir Dace.

Coralie Fontaine heard it from Mary Ann Letsom. In Mary Ann's indignation at the report, she spoke it out to Coralie; and Coralie, laughing at the absurdity of the thing, repeated it to Sir Dace. How *he* received it, or what he said about it, did not transpire.

A stagnant kind of atmosphere seemed to hang over us just then, like the heavy, unnatural calm that precedes the storm. Sir Dace got weaker day by day, more of a shadow; Herbert Tanerton and his brother were still at variance, so far as Jack's future was concerned; and Mr. Chandler seemed to have taken up his abode in London for good.

"Does he *never* mean to come back?" demanded Alice one day of the Squire: and her lips and cheeks were red with fevèr as she asked it. The truth was, that some cause of Paul and Chandler's then on at Westminster was prolonging itself out—even when it did begin—unconscionably.

One morning I met Ben Rymer as he was leaving Oxlip Grange. Coralie Fontaine had walked with him to the gate, talking earnestly, their two heads together. Ben shook hands with her and came out, looking as grave as a judge.

"How is Sir Dace?" I asked him. "Getting on?"

"Getting off," responded Ben. "For that's what it will be now; and not long first, unless he mends."

"Is he worse?"

"He is nearly as bad as he can be, to be alive. And yesterday he must needs go careering off to Islip by himself to transact some business with Paul the lawyer! He was no more fit for it than—than *this* is," concluded Ben, giving a flick to his silk umbrella as he marched off. Ben went in for silk umbrellas now: in the old days a cotton one would have been too good for him.

"I am so sorry to hear Sir Dace is no better," I said to Coralie Fontaine, who had waited at the gate to speak to me.

Coralie shook her head. Some deep feeling sat in her generally passive face: the tears stood in her eyes.

"Thank you, Johnny Ludlow. It is very sad. I feel sure Mr. Rymer has given up all hope, though he does not say so to me. Verena looks nearly as ill as papa. I wish we had never come to Europe!"

"Sir Dace exerts himself too greatly, Mr. Rymer says."

"Yes; and worries himself also. As if his affairs needed as much as a thought!—I am sure they must be just as straight and smooth as yonder green plain. He had to see Mr. Paul yesterday about some alteration in his will, and went to Islip, instead of sending for Paul here. I thought he would have died when he got home. Papa has a strange restlessness upon him. Good-bye, Johnny. I'd ask you to come in but that things are all so miserable."

III.

It was late in the evening, getting towards bed-time. Mrs. Todhetley had gone upstairs with the face-ache, Tod was over at old Coney's, and I and the Squire were sitting alone, when Thomas surprised us by showing in Tom Chandler. We did not know he was back from London.

"Yes, I got back this evening," said he, as he sat down near the lamp, and spread some papers out on the table. "I am in a bit of a dilemma, Mr. Todhetley; and I am come here at this late hour to put it before you."

Chandler's voice had dropped to a mysterious whisper; his eyes were glancing at the door to make sure it was shut. The Squire pushed up his spectacles and drew his chair nearer. I sat on the opposite side, wondering what was coming.

"That suspicion of Alice Tanerton's—that Sir Dace killed Pym," went on Chandler, his left hand resting on the papers, his eyes on the Squire's. "I think it was a true one."

"A what?" cried the Pater.

"A true one. That Sir Dace did kill him."

"Goodness bless me!" gasped the Squire, his good old face taking a lighter tint. "What on earth do you mean, man?"

"Well, I mean just that," answered Chandler. "And I feel myself to be, in consequence, in an uncommonly awkward position. One can't well accuse Sir Dace, a man close upon the grave; and Paul's relative in addition. And yet, Captain Tanerton must be cleared."

"I can't make top or tail of what you mean, Tom Chandler!" cried the Squire, blinking like a bewildered owl. "Don't you think you are dreaming?"

"Wish I was," said Tom, "so far as this business goes. Look here. I'll begin at the beginning and go through the story. You'll understand it then."

"It's more than I do now. Or Johnny, either. Look at him!"

"When Mrs. John Tanerton brought to us that accusation of Sir Dace, on the strength of her dream," began Chandler, after glancing at me, "I thought she must have turned a little crazy. It was a singular dream; there's no denying that; and the exact resemblance to Sir Dace Fontaine of the man she saw in it, was still more singular: so much so, that I could not help being impressed by it. Another thing that strongly impressed me, was Captain Tanerton's testimony: from the moment I heard it and weighed his manner in giving it, I felt sure of his innocence. Revolving these matters in my own mind, I resolved to go to Sir Dace and get him to give me his version of the affair; not in the least endorsing in my own mind her suspicion of him, or hinting at it to him, you understand; simply to get more evidence. I went to Sir Dace, heard what he had to say, and brought away with me a most unpleasant doubt."

"That he was guilty?"

"That he might be. His manner was so confused, himself so agitated when I first spoke. His hands trembled, his lips grew white. He strove to turn it off, saying I had startled him, but I felt a very queer doubt arising in my mind. His narrative had to be drawn from him; it was anything but clear, and full of contradictions. 'Why do you come to me about this?' he asked: 'have you heard anything?' 'I only come to ask you for information,' was my answer: 'Mrs. John Tanerton wants the matter looked into. If her husband is not guilty, he ought to be cleared in the face of the world.' 'Nobody thinks he was guilty,' retorted Sir Dace in a shrill tone of annoyance. 'Nobody was guilty: Pym must have fallen and injured himself.' I came away from the interview, as I tell you, with my doubts very unpleasantly stirred," resumed Chandler;

"and it caused me to be more earnest in looking after odds and ends of evidence in London than I otherwise might have been."

"Did you pick up any?"

"Ay, I did. I turned the people at the Marylebone lodgings inside out, so to say; I found out a Mrs. Ball, where Verena Fontaine had hidden herself; and I quite haunted Dame Richenough's in Ship Street, Tower Hill. There I met with Mark Ferrar. A piece of good fortune, for he told me something that ——"

"What was it?" gasped the Squire, eagerly.

"Why this—and a most important piece of evidence it is. That night, not many minutes before the fatal accident must have occurred, Ferrar saw Sir Dace Fontaine in Ship Street, watching Pym's room. He was standing in an entry on the opposite side of the street, gazing across at Pym's. This, you perceive, disproves one fact testified to —that Sir Dace spent that evening shut up in his library at home. Instead of that he was absolutely down on the spot."

The Squire rubbed his face like a helpless man. "Why could not Ferrar have said so at the time?" he asked.

"Ferrar attached no importance to it; he thought Sir Dace was but looking over to see whether his daughter was at Pym's. But Ferrar had no opportunity of giving testimony: he sailed away the next morning in the ship. Nothing could exceed his astonishment when I told him in London that Captain Tanerton lay under the suspicion. He has taken Crabb on his way to Worcester to support this testimony if needful, and to impart it privately to Tanerton."

"Well, it all seems a hopeless puzzle to me," returned the Pater. "Why on earth did not Jack speak out more freely, and say he was not guilty?"

"I don't know. The fact, that Sir Dace did go out that night," continued Chandler, "was confirmed by one of the maids in the Marylebone Road—Maria; a smart girl with curled hair. She says Sir Dace had not been many minutes in the library that night, to which he went straight from the dinner-table in a passion, when she saw him leave it again, catch up his hat with a jerk as he passed through the hall, and go out at the front door. It was just after Ozias had been to ask him whether he would take some coffee, and got sent away with a flea in his ear. Whether or not Sir Dace came in during the evening, Maria does not know; he may, or may not, have done so; but she did see him come home in a cab at ten o'clock, or soon after it. She was gossipping with the maids at a house some few doors off, when a cab stopped near to them; Sir Dace got out of it, paid the man, and walked on to his own door. Maria supposed the driver had made a mistake in the number. So you see there can be no doubt that Sir Dace was out that night."

"He was certainly in soon after ten," I remarked. "Verena came home about that time, and she saw him downstairs."

"Don't you bring *her* name up, Johnny," corrected the Squire.

"That young woman led to all the mischief. Running away, as she did—and sending us off to that wax-work show in search of her! Fine figures they cut, some of those dumb things!"

"I found also," resumed Chandler, turning over his papers, on which he had looked from time to time, "that Sir Dace met with one or two slight personal mishaps that night. He sprained his wrist, accounting for it the next morning by saying he had slipped in getting into bed; and he lost a little piece out of his shirt-front."

"Out of his shirt-front!"

"Just here," and Chandler touched the middle button of his shirt. "The button-hole and a portion of the linen round it had been torn away. Nothing would have been known of that but for the laundress. She brought the shirt back before putting it into water, lest it should be said she had done it in the washing. Maria remembered this, and told me. A remarkably intelligent girl, that."

"Did Maria—I remember the girl—suspect anything?" asked the Squire.

"Nothing whatever. She does not now; I accounted otherwise for my enquiries. Altogether, what with these facts I have told you, and a few minor items, and Ferrar's evidence, I can draw but one conclusion—that Sir Dace Fontaine killed Pym."

"I never heard such a strange thing!" cried the Pater. "And what's to be done?"

"That's the question," said Chandler. "What *is* to be done?" And he left us with the doubt.

Well, it turned out to be quite true; but I have not space here to go more into detail. Sir Dace Fontaine was guilty, and the dream was a true dream.

"Did you suspect him?" the Squire asked privately of Jack, who was taken into counsel the next day.

"No, I never suspected Sir Dace," Jack answered. "I suspected someone else—Verena."

"No!"

"I did. About half-past eight o'clock that night, Ferrar had seen a young lady—or somebody dressed as one—watching Pym's house from the opposite entry: just where, it now appears, he later saw Sir Dace. Ferrar thought it was Verena Fontaine. A little later, in fact just after the calamity must have occurred, Alfred Saxby also saw a young lady running from the direction of the house, whom he also took to be Verena. Ferrar and I came to the same conclusion—I don't know about Saxby—that Verena must have been present when it happened. *I* thought that, angry at the state Pym was in, she might have given him a push in her vexation, perhaps inadvertently, and that he fell. Who knew?"

"But Verena was elsewhere that evening, you know; at a concert."

"I knew she said so; but I did not believe it. Of course I know

now that both Ferrar and Saxby were mistaken; that it was somebody else they saw, who bore, one must imagine, some general resemblance to her."

"Well, I think you might have known better," cried the Squire.

"Yes, I suppose I ought to. But, before the inquest had terminated, I chanced to be alone with Verena; and her manner —nay, her words, two or three she said—seemed to imply her guilt, and also a consciousness that I must be aware of it. I had no doubt at all from that hour."

"And is it for that reason, consideration for her, that you have partially allowed suspicion to rest upon yourself?" pursued the Squire, hotly.

"Of course. How could I be the means of throwing it upon a defenceless girl?"

"Well, John Tanerton, you are a chivalrous goose!"

"Verena must have known the truth all along."

"*That's* not probable," contended the Squire. "And Chandler wants to know what is to be done."

"Nothing at all, that I can see," answered Jack. "Sir Dace is not in a condition to have trouble thrown upon him."

Good Jack! generous Jack! There are not many such self-denying spirits in the world.

And what would have been done is beyond guessing, had Sir Dace not solved the difficulty himself. Solved it by dying.

But I must first tell of a little matter that happened. Although we had heard what we had, one could not treat the man cavalierly, and the Squire—just as good at heart as Jack—went up to make enquiries at Oxlip Grange, as usual. One day he and Colonel Letsom strolled up together, and were asked to walk in. Sir Dace wished to see them.

"If ever you saw a living skeleton, it's what he is," cried the Squire to us when he came home. "It is in the nature of the disease, I believe, that he should be. Dress him up in his shroud, and you'd take him for nothing but bones."

Sir Dace was in the easy-chair by his bed-room fire, Coralie sitting with him. By his side stood a round table with papers and letters upon it.

"I am glad you have chanced to call," he said to them, as he sent Coralie away. "I wanted my signature witnessed by someone in influential authority. You are both county magistrates."

"The signature to your will," cried the Squire, falling to that conclusion.

"Not my will," answered Sir Dace. "That is settled."

He turned to the table, his long, emaciated, trembling fingers singling out a document that lay upon it. "This is a declaration," he said, "which I have written out myself, being of sound mind, you perceive, and which I wish to sign in your presence. I testify that

every word written in it is truth; I, a dying man, swear that it is so, before God."

His shaky hands scrawled his signature, Dace Fontaine; and the Squire and Colonel Letsom added theirs to it. Sir Dace then sealed up the paper, and made them each affix his seal also. He then tottered to a cabinet standing by the bed's head, and locked it up in it.

"You will know where to find it when I am gone," he said. "I wish someone of you to read it aloud, after the funeral, to those assembled here. When my will shall have been read, then read this."

On the third day after this, at evening, Sir Dace Fontaine died. We heard no more about anything until the day of the funeral, which took place on the following Monday. Sir Dace left a list of those he wished invited to it, and they went. Sir Robert Tenby, Mr. Brandon, Colonel Letsom and his eldest son; the parsons of Timberdale, Crabb, and Islip; the three doctors who had attended him; old Paul and Tom Chandler; Captain Tanerton, and ourselves.

He was buried at Islip, by his own directions. And when we got back to the Grange, after leaving him in the cold churchyard, Mr. Paul read out the will. Coralie and Verena sat in the room in their deep mourning. Coralie's eyes were dry, but Verena sobbed incessantly.

Apart from a few legacies, one of which was to his servant Ozias, his property was left to his two daughters, in equal shares. The chief legacy, a large one, was left to John Tanerton—three thousand pounds. You should have seen Jack's face of astonishment as he heard it. Herbert looked as if he could not believe his ears. And Verena glanced across at Jack with a happy flush.

"Papa charged me, just before he died, to say that a sealed paper of his would be found in his private cabinet, which was to be read out now," spoke Coralie, in the pause which ensued, as old Paul's voice ceased. "He said Colonel Letsom and Mr. Todhetley would know where to find it," she added; breaking down with a sob.

The paper was fetched, and old Paul was requested to read it. So he broke the seals.

You may have guessed what it was: a declaration of his guilt—if guilt it could be called. In a straightforward manner he stated the particulars of that past night: and the following is a summary of them.

Sir Dace went out again that night after dinner, not in secret, or with any idea of secresy; it simply chanced, he supposed, that no one saw him go. He was too uneasy about Verena to rest; he fully believed her to be with Pym; and he went down to Ship Street. Before entering the street he dismissed the cab, and proceeded cautiously to reconnoitre, believing that if he were seen, Pym would be capable of concealing Verena. After looking about till he was tired,

he took up his station opposite Pym's lodgings—which seemed to be empty—and stayed, watching, until close upon nine o'clock, when he saw Pym enter them. Before he had time to go across, the landlady began to close the shutters; while she was doing it, Captain Tanerton came up, and went in. Captain Tanerton came out in a minute or two, and walked quickly back up the street: he, Sir Dace, would have gone after him to ask him whether Verena was indoors with Pym, or not, but the Captain's steps were too fleet for him. Sir Dace then crossed over, opened the street door, and entered Pym's parlour. A short, sharp quarrel ensued. Pym was in liquor, and—consequently—insolent. In the heat of passion Sir Dace—he was a strong man then—seized Pym's arm, and shook him. Pym flew at him in return like a tiger, twisted his wrist round, and tore his shirt. Sir Dace was furious then; he struck him a powerful blow on the head—behind the ear no doubt, as the surgeons testified afterwards—and Pym fell. Leaving him there, Sir Dace quitted the house quietly, never glancing at the thought that the blow could be fatal. But, when seated in a cab on the way home, the idea suddenly occurred to him—what if he had killed Pym? The conviction, though he knew not why, or wherefore, that he had killed him, took hold of him, and he went into his house, a terrified man. The rest was known, the manuscript went on to say. He allowed people to remain in the belief that he had not been out of doors that night: though how bitterly he repented not having declared the truth at the time, none could know, save God. He now, a dying man, about to appear before that God, who had been full of mercy to him, declared that this was the whole truth, and he further declared that he had no intention whatever of injuring Pym; all he thought was, to knock him down for his insolence. He hoped the world would forgive him, though he had never forgiven himself; and he prayed his daughters to forgive him, especially Verena. He would counsel her to return to the West Indies, and marry George Bazalgette.

That ended the declaration: and an astounding surprise it must have been to most of the eager listeners. But not one ventured to make any comment on it, good or bad. The legacy to John Tanerton was understood now. Verena crossed the room as we were filing out, and put her two hands into his.

"I have had a dreadful fear upon me that it was papa," she whispered to him, the tears running down her cheeks. "Nay, worse than a fear: a conviction. I think you have had the same, Captain Tanerton, and that you have generously done your best to screen him; and I thank you with my whole heart."

"But, indeed," began Jack—and pulled himself up, short.

"Let me tell you all," said Verena. "I saw papa come in that night: I mean to our lodgings in the Marylebone Road, so I knew he had been out. It was just past ten o'clock; Ozias saw him too—but he is silent and faithful. I did not want papa to see me; fate, I

suppose, made me back into that little room, papa's library, until he should have gone upstairs. He did not go up; he came into the room: and I hid myself behind the window curtain. I cannot describe to you how strange papa looked; *dreadful;* and he groaned and flung up his arms as one does in despair. It frightened me so much that I said nothing to anybody. Still I had not the key to it: I thought it must be about me: and the torn shirt—for I saw that, and saw him button his coat over it—I supposed he had, himself, done accidentally. I drew one of the glass-doors softly open, got out that way, and up to the drawing-room. Then you came in with the news of Edward's death. At first, for a day or so, I thought as others did—that suspicion lay on you. But, gradually, all these facts impressed themselves on my mind in their startling reality; and I felt, I saw, it could have been no other than he—my poor father. Oh, Captain Tanerton, forgive him! Forgive me!"

"There's nothing to forgive; I am sorry it has come out now," whispered Jack, deeming it wise to leave it at that, and he stooped and gave her the kiss of peace.

So this was the end of it. Of the affair which had so unpleasantly puzzled the world, and tried Jack.

Jack, loyal, honest-hearted Jack, shook hands with everybody, giving a double shake to Herbert's, and went forthwith down to Liverpool.

"I will take the *Rose of Delhi* again, now," he said to the Freemans. "For this next voyage, at any rate."

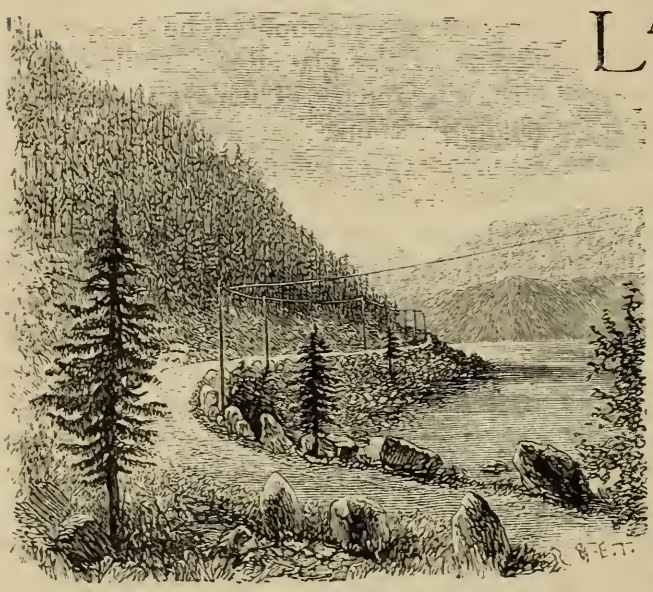
"And for many a one after it, we hope, Captain Tanerton," was their warm answer. And Jack and his bright face went direct from the office to New Brighton, to tell Aunt Dean.

And what became of the Miss Fontaines, you would like to ask? Well, I have not time at present to tell you about Coralie; I don't know when I shall have. But, if you'll believe me, Verena took her father's advice, sailed back over the seas, and married George Bazalgette.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

ABOUT NORWAY.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland."



On the Road to Laerdal.

LAERDALSÖREN, at the head of the Sogne Fjord, is quite an important little town for Norway, but in England would be thought little more than a village. Its aspect is that of a hamlet surrounded by high mountains, which press so closely on the one side that a sense of suffocation quickly follows upon arrival, and a sojourn of several days becomes almost intolerable. Few people stay beyond one night, so that a constant stream of visitors is in motion. A small stream, it is true, since Norway is amongst the comparatively unvisited countries of the earth. Nevertheless, it is so by comparison only. As a matter of fact, during the few available months of the year, Norway finds its worshippers, and they are as many as need be.

Laerdalsören, or Laerdal, as it is indifferently called, has some 800 inhabitants. A quaint, old-fashioned place, the houses all built of wood; the one street straggling, long, and narrow, with small byways leading round to the cottages and huts facing the fjord: tenements, some of them, that look ancient and in the last stage of consumption, for the most part inhabited by the boatmen and fishermen of the district. Beyond these settlements the grand waters of the Sogne Fjord open out. On either side rise the mountains, massive and frowning, full of majesty and splendour. As you gaze, impatience seizes upon you to quit the small, confined village, launch out upon those waters, round those great bulwarks of nature, and make acquaintance with what lies beyond.

Yet I doubt whether this was precisely our case the night we reached Laerdal. Our four days' incessant journeying had been full of novelty and enjoyment: but the truth of the old saying,

"Be moderate in all things," cannot be disputed. We had descended lower and lower into the valley, until the mountains expanded and the stream widened and yielded up its life to the fjord, and we found ourselves in the plain, on a level with the far-off sea—for the Sogne Fjord stretches 120 miles up into the land.

We soon reached the church and the first of the straggling houses forming the town; passed the post and telegraph office—always a welcome sight in these remote parts as a connecting link with civilization—and in a few moments were at Lindström's hotel, and in clover. Our present quarters were luxurious; a well-furnished double sitting-room containing a fine-toned piano; and beyond, a dining-room—well supplied with white bread! When A. caught sight of the latter—we had seen none since leaving Christiania—I trembled for his reason: for the day of reckoning: for the task that lay before the bread maker.

The landlord spoke tolerable English; spoke it better than he understood it: for he often interpreted what was said to him à tort et à travers, and had an uncomfortable way of answering Yes or No at random; trusting to chance to be right or wrong, and, of course, seldom with a happy result. One slight incident was rather amusing, and proved how easily people may blunder who do not understand each other.

I wished to arrange for a boat to take us the next morning to Aardal, but the landlord had disappeared. In the passage was a stout old dame, the landlord's mother, who knew not a word of English. In answer to a request for her son, she placed her arms a-kimbo, fell a-musing for a moment, and then rushing off as fast as her size permitted, brought back in triumph a tobacco-jar. An interesting object, no doubt, but not exactly what was then required.

We laughed at what she now comprehended was a misapprehension. The request was repeated, and, yet more, the owner of the place was indicated by signs as well as words. Light broke upon her.

"A—h! Ja! ja! Now she knew!" And disappearing through a doorway—which Nature forced her to take sideways, like a crab—she returned in a twinkling, out of breath, but full of self-congratulation at her intelligence, and presented me with a matchbox and a sounding "Vor so got!"

I gave up in despair, but, not to damp her ardour, accepted the matchbox. Almost at the same moment the landlord reappeared, the difficulty was over, and our wants were made known. In a short time he informed us that he had arranged for a boat and three rowers to be at our disposal at eight o'clock the next morning. It was at least a four hours' row to Aardal.

Remembering the late passage-at-arms with the old lady, I enquired of Herr Lindström the Norwegian word for landlord. He misunderstood the question, thought I asked for the name of the landlord at Aardal, and replied "Klingenberg."

"Klingenberg," I returned, wondering what could be its derivation. "A strange word for landlord."

"Very strange," answered Herr Lindström, yet looking as if he thought the strangeness all on my side. But, never doubting, I accepted the lesson. This, too, presently gave rise to sundry cross-questions and crooked answers.

The wild mountains were so close to the inn as to overshadow it, and seemed to crush upon us. Several small waterfalls trickled down the sides immediately before us, like silvery threads, making music as they ran—rather too much music when it came to the silent hours of the night. Yet the next morning arrived only too soon. But with the excitement of new scenes energy revived. At eight o'clock the boatmen were waiting at the door of the inn, and we started on our way to the Vettifos, one of the great waterfalls and wonders of Norway. It goes under different names—the Vettifos, the Vettisfos, the Mörkfos, and the Mörkavettisfos.

We passed down the straggling street, found the boat at the shores of the fjord, and were soon out upon the deep waters. The men, knowing what was before them, began, continued, and ended their work in an especially calm and leisurely manner, that slightly taxed one's patience. Yet we made way, surely if slowly, and found that Laerdal was beginning to grow less distinct, until it looked no more than a small colony of fishermen's huts at the head of the fjord; a handful of tenements dwarfed to the size of toy houses and Noah's arks by the surrounding heights. At length we turned an angle and it was lost to sight.

We were now surrounded by gloomy mountains, wild, barren, and severe, towering in all directions, diversified in outline, and full of majestic grandeur. Before us, a vast expanse of water, like an immense lake, calm and tranquil, its dark green, almost black tinge, telling of immense and cruel depths.

For upwards of four hours we were rowing amidst such scenes, varied only by an occasional fir-clad hill, and tiny house on the mountain slope, where men were chopping and stacking wood; singing a song the while, which went ringing across the water, and seemed to startle by its merriment all the surrounding silence and gloom. Often, for long together not a sound broke the stillness, save the measured dip of the oars, as the men, leisurely as ever, carried us onward.

To avoid the tide they hugged the shore in many places, and at one time came upon one of the small settlements—the little house on the slope, surrounded by pines, and the men chopping wood. This was a favourable moment for a rest. An animated conversation ensued in a language that seemed a pot-pourri of Chinese and chop-sticks (this is not meant for a pun, reader), and away we shot again; leaving the choppers to their work—and how remote from the world!

So at last another turn brought us in sight of Aardal. Here

Nature had put on a more smiling mood; and, as we neared, disclosed a small colony of picturesque houses with red roofs and green shutters; a church with a quaint little spire—all surrounded by sloping hills, smiling and fertile; a picture of quiet prosperity, of tranquillity and repose, such as they who live out in the great bustling world of life dream of, perhaps, but know not. A small pier shot out into the water, for which the rowers made. The inn stood out just above the landing, cool and white in the sunshine, small and of no pretension, but kept by two of the honestest men in Norway—Jens Klingenberg and his son Jens.

A stalwart man, no longer young, came hurrying down. This, thought I, is the landlord; and remembering the lesson I had learnt from Herr Lindström,

"Klingenberg?" said I, as we landed: meaning thereby, "Are you the innkeeper?"

"Ja! ja! Klingenberg!" cried he, with a perfect shout of delight at another proof that his reputation had preceded him into the world. His face shone with honesty and good-will, and grasping my hand to assist in hoisting me up from the boat, he wrung it with a force that brought tears to the eyes—though not, I fear, tears of gratitude. You see, he altogether mistook the question—we were at cross-purposes. A younger man now came out of the house, strong and well made, with an open, intelligent face: too much like the old man to be anyone but Jens Klingenberg junior.

"Klingenberg, I suppose?" I repeated, as before.

"Ja! ja!" he cried, just as his father had done, a broad grin upon his honest face, and hastening to welcome us.

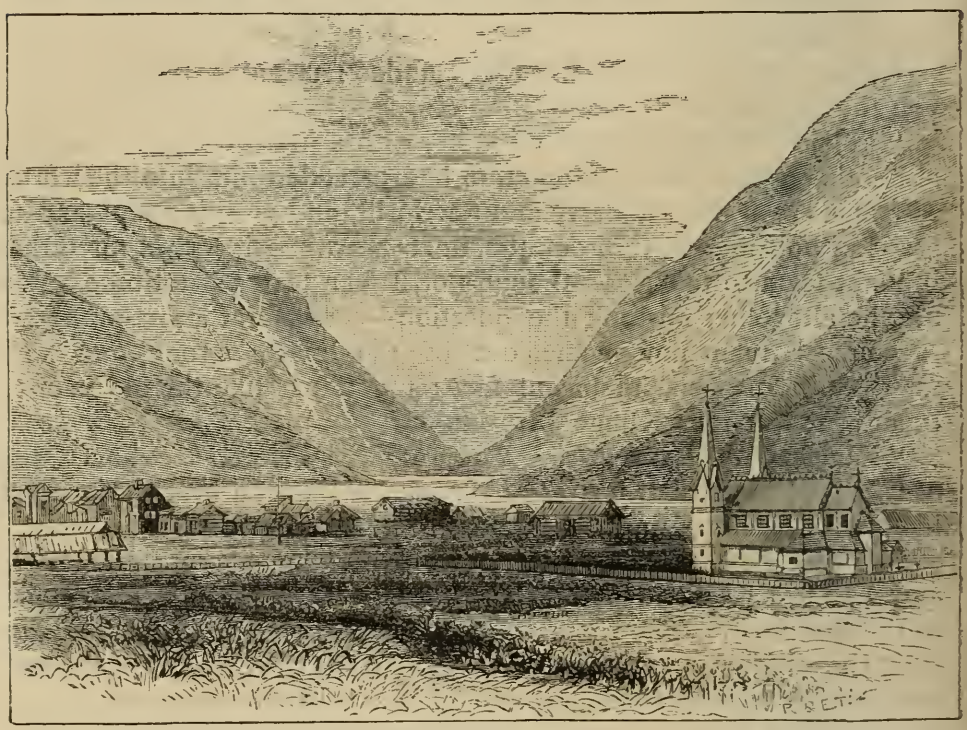
So in we went, cramped by our four or five hours' seat in the boat, and glad to shake out some of the stiffness by a climb up the stairs to the first floor. The rooms were light and cheerful, and the view from the windows was glorious. Before us the little pier, the boatmen now leaning against the sides, and glad enough of a rest: still more glad of some beer, for which they developed unlimited capacities, and Klingenberg inexhaustible stores. Far away beyond the pier stretched the calm deep waters of the fjord; the stately mountains on either side narrowing more and more towards Aardal, until, away behind the house, they closed in the view.

It was now past one o'clock, and we were only half-way on our journey. From here to the Vettifos was an almost continual ascent, and the road was steep and rugged. Luckily a horse was to be had, or the journey would have been as much beyond my powers as the possession of Aladdin's lamp, or any other of the cherished impossibilities of youth. Happily, too, A.'s powers of walking and climbing were unlimited: there was no need to draw lots for the "fiery steed."

We started about two o'clock, with young Klingenberg as guide—a necessary accompaniment. Passing through the village, by the little white church and the cottages, we reached the borders of a small

lake. From an adjoining boathouse Jens brought out a saddle. Then he and two men rowed us swiftly across the water, and we landed again in about a quarter of an hour. We left the boat in charge of the men, and Jens threw the heavy saddle over his shoulder as if it had been but a feather's weight.

About twenty minutes' walk through the fields and over the slopes, and we reached a small settlement, where, hard by, a cream-coloured horse was grazing. In answer to Jens' call, a man came out of a carpenter's shed; a man pale and refined looking, with one of the noblest heads I had ever seen. He gave Jens a nod of good fellowship, and went off for the horse. Jens on his part threw down the



LAERDALSOREN.

saddle, not sorry, with all his strength, to get rid of his load. It fitted the horse's back far better than his shoulder.

As for the horse, it was one of the prettiest, most docile creatures imaginable. Before I had done with it, I loved the animal, and like the Irishman with his cow, could I have sent it over to England in a letter, it should have bid a long farewell to its wild mountain life. It was grazing quietly about a hundred yards away. Then, catching sight of us, it knew well enough what the invasion meant; and pricking up its ears, and arching its neck, gave a slight neigh and began gently trotting up and down, its fine white mane and long tail fluttering in the breeze. It answered the master's call as obediently as a dog, and followed gently at his heels up to the cottage.

We were soon ready and once more on the way. Now began a

long, toilsome climb, which lasted until seven o'clock at night. I had never yet gone through anything of the kind on horseback: I am not sure that I should care to attempt it again. Without ever encountering actual danger—thanks to the sure-footedness of the horse—we were often in what appeared such imminent peril, that more than once I regretted the adventure and devoutly wished myself back again. For the pedestrians there was not even an appearance of risk, beyond the possibility of stones loosening from the heights and rolling down upon them.

From the very beginning I noticed how wonderfully the horse piloted himself over the rough places and through impossible diffi-

On the Road to Vetti.

culties; exercising a skill and discrimination far greater than that of his rider. At length I gave it up to him, and allowed him to take his own course. The sagacity of the animal was marvellous; the manner in which he would pause a moment at a troublesome spot, seem to pick out his way mentally, and then, boldly taking it, never hesitate until it was over.

Jens was dressed in mountain costume: a short brown jacket, breeches coming down to his knees, dark ribbed stockings, and boots thick and heavy. He carried a thick stick, spiked, and wore a low felt hat, broad and picturesque. Over his arm he had thrown a macintosh, an apparently useless encumbrance this sunny day; but Jens was wiser than we were, and knew more about his own climate; and presently, when he got tired of his burden, the horse relieved him of it.

The road was uneven enough from the very beginning, but nothing startling, and for a time we went on calmly. True, the horse would sometimes mount a hillock which brought my head into contact with his ; and in descending reversed the matter, and left it prone with his tail. He seemed to think nothing of these little diversions : took them in so matter-of-fact a spirit that I was forced to do likewise.

In this valley the scenery was laughing, sunny, and almost fertile. Fir trees clothed the slopes, and birches were sprinkled about the plain, which also yielded a carpet of ferns and flowers. But presently we turned to the right, and in a nook of the mountains suddenly came upon the roar of a torrent. In a few moments we were in sight of the grand waterfall itself, rushing down in great strength from the mountain height, breaking in its course into three or four distinct falls, one below the other : an immense volume of white foam making all the air alive with its noise, and destroying the sense of solitude that filled the pass.

A lovely and lonely spot indeed, wild and weird to the last degree. The slopes were a mixture of hard barren rock and pine trees that fringed delicately against the bright blue sky : great boulders stood out frowningly, many of them hundreds of tons in weight, split, in great cracks and fissures, from the mountain, and hanging, as it seemed, by a mere thread. Around us, and in the bed of the torrent, to which they offered small impediment, lay great pieces of rock and stone.

Here I encountered my first "sensation" on horseback, and proved how dependable was my gentle steed. Advancing towards the waterfall, we soon reached a bridge which had to be crossed. It seemed composed of logs of wood, literally not more than a foot wide in all, without any protection on either side in the shape of railing. The water rushed beneath it over great boulders with tremendous force and speed ; the spray flew upwards and around, and as we neared it a cold dampness in the air penetrated to our very marrow. The noise of the waterfall was like thunder ; our voices had quite a far-off sound, and could scarcely be heard. So abundant was the spray that Jens put on his macintosh. The bridge was wet and slippery, and over this I was expected to guide the quadruped in full possession of all my faculties.

The first impulse was to get down ; but I saw that by so doing I should so sink in the estimation of Jens, that of the two evils I preferred the least certain, and kept my seat. Away we went, and I gave myself up for lost.

But the horse took the planks with the greatest coolness ; and in the very middle of the bridge, within an ace of the rushing water, deafened and confused by the noise, wet and chilled by the spray, came to a dead stop, as much as to say : "Admire this sublime scene, but above all admire the steadiness of my nerve and the coolness of my head." Then, at a slight call from Jens, who was in advance

with A., he quietly set in motion again, and got over to the other side.

I felt that I had gone through a tremendous peril; had had a narrow escape from the jaws of death. In reality it was nothing of the sort, and existed only in imagination; but that made no difference to the impression. Certainly if the horse had slipped both would have rolled over: there was no space to recover footing. But these horses never do slip, and you must make up your mind to resign yourself to them in faith.

If danger existed at all, it came after: it was then one really required to bring courage and coolness to aid. Now began a very steep, sharp, and, as it seemed, perilous ascent for one on horseback. The narrow, broken path wound up the mountain, and we gradually seemed to rise far above the valley and the world, and to be on a level with the waterfall. We now looked down upon what we had so lately looked up to, and seemed to command the situation. The water rushed below us with a far-off sound. Often I could not see an inch of ground beside me: nothing but space. The path was rough, and its curves were so sharp and sudden that more than once the horse brought his feet together, and his head overhung one side of the precipice and his tail overhung the other. At such moments I felt like Mahomet's coffin, hovering between heaven and earth; like an eagle suspended in mid air, but—I hardly blush to own it—without the eagle's courage because without his wings. I gazed sheerly into yawning depths; to slip from the horse's back would have been to step into thin air.

All this would have been lost in walking, as it was lost upon A., who serenely wended his rough way onwards, yet more than once turned round to call out that he would sooner trust his own legs than the horse's. He and Jens took the lead and kept it easily. My progress on horseback was a far slower one than theirs on foot. The animal was deliberate in his movements, pondered them well, paused every now and then a whole half-minute between one step and the next. He knew that the slightest mistake meant death to himself and his rider. In some places the slip of an inch, a tread upon a loose stone, would have given us a long flight into the depths, to take our place amongst the rocks, and for ever to pass out of life and our little earthly sphere. It is melancholy to think that the world would have gone on rolling just the same.

> "Our little systems have their day;
> They have their day, and cease to be."

So it is for the very best of us. But I do not know that this is productive of any individual consolation. Companionship in suffering, which creates sympathy one with another, we know is sweet to man, who is made up of such a mixture of good and ill; but in the closing scene of all, this consolation is for ever denied us.

At length we reached our highest point and began to descend. Tremendous and dangerous as seemed the climbing, the downward process was far worse. Every now and then the horse himself would stand still, and Jens had to rouse his drooping courage by a call: once or twice he even had to come back and lead him forward.

So we went on, until we reached once more an open level plain, through which ran a noisy shallow stream—water pursues us everywhere in Norway—the shallower the noisier, according to the fashion of this world and the custom of the people in it. Here was green grass and soft turf; and the horse and its rider, now on excellent terms with each other, made up for lost time, passed Jens and A. with a bound, and went flying off on the wings of the wind. Before the pedestrians had traversed that long bit of plain, we had scoured it half-a-dozen times. Then a short ascent, and we reached the small farm of Gjelde, and were half way to Vetti.

Here we dismounted, and found ourselves in a mountain hut or cottage, the interior so dark that we could scarcely distinguish the long deal table at one end, a rough chair or bench here and there, and a bed in a kind of recess. A woman, the sole occupant, appeared glad to see anyone coming up from the world, though that world might be no larger or more important than Aardal. Opposite this hut was another, where sat a woman and a girl near a braize fire, in a chimney almost as big as the hut itself. The woman was rolling out some oat-cake dough into the thickness of a sixpence, large and round, about two feet in diameter. When rolled it seemed tough and hard, more like paper than anything else This, with acrobatic dexterity and the aid of a long thin stick, she tossed upon a large flat piece of iron, a sort of frying-pan without sides, and placed it upon the embers. When baked it was tossed again on to a pile lying beside her. This was called "flad-bröd," and flat it certainly was in every sense of the word: tasteless, and containing, one supposed, a small amount of nourishment. But the Norwegians seem able to keep life in the body with what would be gradual starvation to other people. No doubt their free healthy life, which calls for the smallest possible wear and tear of the nervous system, counts for a great deal in the matter. For, with it all, they are hardy and contented. The old woman sitting near her braize fire, baking her bread, was a veritable picture: a strange picture of life, full of rough power; a certain silent eloquence that carried its lesson, if one chose to see the application. She looked at us in a kindly manner, and nodded, but never moved from her position or ceased from her work.

The hardest part of the road yet lay before us, and began with the very beginning. As we left the cottage, down in the fields of this little farm we saw two men ploughing in an original manner. Their arms were thrown round each other's necks, and thus, naturally yoked together, they dragged the plough behind them, and the work was done.

Soon after starting we came to another magnificent cataract, the Gjeldefos, which, from a tremendous height, fell in showers of beautiful spray; now hundreds of feet clear of all obstacles, and now coming into contact with the rock and fringing itself into white foam and devices so fantastic, that it seemed as if Art had here lent her aid to Nature. This fall was infinitely beautiful.

The ascent now became so steep and rugged, the paths so difficult and broken, so full of loose stones, that it was harder work than ever both for the horse and the walkers. Higher we ascended, and yet more high, and wilder, grander and more sublime and severe grew the scenery. The rugged mountains gradually closed in the pass, which became so contracted that we seemed to be reaching the end of all things. Far down we gazed into a narrow gorge, through which the noisy shallow water ran: an accumulation of trees, rocks, stones, ferns and wild-flowers; a tremendous mountain chasm; all the difficulties and sublime points of the Valley of Diamonds, but alas, without its precious stones. Here and there the mountain sides were perpendicular from the top to the bottom: immense walls of stone that took one's very breath away to contemplate.

The weather now changed. Heavy clouds gathered and threw their dark shadows over the pass, which assumed a weird, sombre, and dejected appearance. One felt the influence insensibly, and a downpour of rain now commenced. The very beauties of nature take to themselves wings, when the sun withdraws his face. Jens, with a macintosh coming down to his heels, set weather and rain at defiance; whilst the beauties of the pass seemed equally indifferent to him. But A., who had brought no macintosh, turned up his collar, and began to look out for signs of the Vetti farm.

In due time they declared themselves. At length we seemed to rise on a level with the mountain tops; we turned off from the narrow path edging the precipice, and passing to the right, reached a sort of plateau or table-land, still rough and uneven, but evidently the beginning of the end. In a short time, 5,000 feet above the level of the sea, out of the world, out of sight and sound of humanity; in a spot secret, retired, and silent as the grave—and little less cheerful—we came upon the humble settlement of the Vetti Farm. The rain was pouring in torrents; it was now seven o'clock; evidently we could do nothing but remain here quietly for the night, and go on to the fall the next morning. For though at *Vetti*, we were not at the *fos:* it would still take two hours to reach it, acquaint ourselves with its wonders, and return to the farm.

Jens was relieved at our decision. That very morning only he had returned from the Vettifos with two young students who had come all the way from Sweden for the purpose of making excursions in Aardal and the Sogne Fjord: and though he seemed still to have plenty of work in him, he must have had enough of it for one day.

So we made ourselves as comfortable as circumstances permitted. A solitary mountain hut, dark skies, a steady downpour of rain; a temperature cold and chilling; no fire; people who spoke not one word of English; all this was only conducive to hilarity to such natures as belong to Mr. Mark Tapley.

Yet we found more than could have been expected in a spot so desolate, so difficult of access, so remote from the world—and so far above it. The little hut contained a living-room, two tiny sleeping-rooms, just large enough to hold two small beds in each, and a fourth room that was half bed, half store-room. As there was not space in the sleeping-rooms for a bed *and* a wash-hand-stand, a basin—not too large—was placed on a chair in a sitting-room; and an original looking-glass developed mountains and precipices in one's physiognomy and reflected a double set of features. We endeavoured to buy it as a curiosity, but the people evidently considered it a rare and precious article, and refused to part with it.

This cottage had evidently been built for the accommodation of travellers. The people of the farm lived in a building opposite, which seemed composed of one large room, with a huge chimney corner, where peats were burning, and sending forth fragrant odours. They were decent, civilized-looking people, like most of their kind we saw in Aardal: men and women of a type above the ordinary men and women one meets with in that class of life.

They prepared us a famous tea in their own quarters, and ran across with it to ours. The very fact of not being able to comprehend each other—for not even Jens spoke a word of English—made the slight errors and misunderstandings that occurred, so many golden opportunities for merriment in this gloomy abode.

Before Jens disappeared for the night we had a long and animated conversation with him, and though often wide of the mark, each was convinced of being thoroughly understood by the other. There was something so intelligent about Jens, that his ignorance of English was nothing short of a disgrace: he was so open, frank and honest, so anxious to please, so gentle and quiet, that we felt ourselves lucky to have found so pleasant a guide. In this benighted spot, not only hours, but days and weeks away from all civilization, an ill-tempered or morose fellow, with an "evil eye" or an ungainly cast of countenance, would have been an object for conciliation with fear and trembling. Jens was the exact opposite to all this.

The next morning we started soon after five o'clock for the Vettifos. From this point everyone had to walk: the path was too rugged, broken, and precipitous for any horse to attempt it.

A road rough and rugged indeed; full of rocks and stones, brambles and wild roots; overgrown with tangle which concealed many of the inequalities, and sent you now and then sprawling head foremost in a manner more grotesque than pleasant. A sharp, steep, quick descent. The rain, which had come down in torrents all night,

had now ceased; but the path was wet and slippery, and the shrubs, often up to one's waist, were dripping water.

At last the bottom; and turning sharply to the right, before us was the waterfall we had come so far to seek. A high, perpendicular cliff, straight as a wall, and over the summit came tumbling the white water, in a clear fall of 1,000 feet, touching no rock, meeting no obstacle in its way. In this its greatest attraction consists. Other falls are as high, and higher; other falls have as great a body of water, and greater; but an unbroken descent of 1,000 feet, this is what other falls have not. Fancy an immense column of water falling nearly three times the height of St. Paul's.

And yet we were both disappointed. There was no doubt about that. We had heard so much of the Vettifos; it had been described in colours so glowing as an eighth wonder of the world, and one of the great wonders of Norway, that we had expected more than the reality. In point of beauty it was not to be compared with the two great waterfalls we had passed on the road from Aardal.

The surrounding rocks were so gigantic that the immense height could not be realised. The body of water was small: so small that towards the bottom the water lost itself in spray. After heavy rains it increases, but the rains of this one night had not made any perceptible difference. Jens said he had often seen a much greater volume of water than to-day. It was certainly wonderful to see this long, unbroken column; to trace its progress from the moment it left the height to the very end, always falling, falling, falling; but it raised little emotion beyond that of marvel.

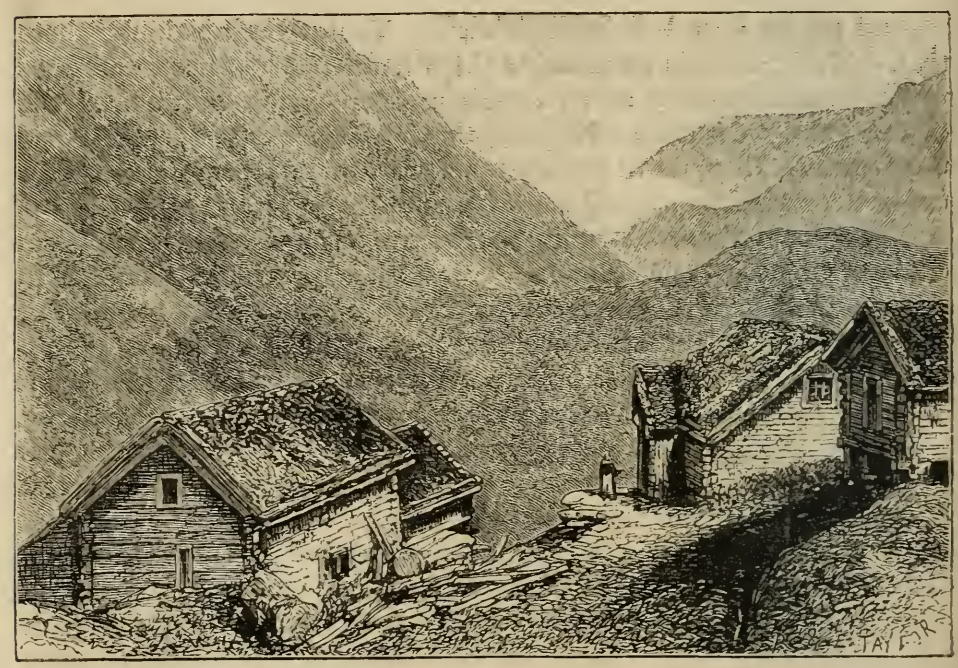
Many things were against us. We had had to turn out at an early hour; the dull, gloomy morning threatened rain; it was cold and raw; the road had been wet and unpleasant, the walk laborious in the extreme; imagination had found nothing on which to fasten itself. Well for us that the whole way up from Aardal had been so full of beauty—it is one of the grandest passes in Norway—so sublime in its severity, which had more than delighted and repaid us for our exertions: otherwise, to disappointment would have been added vexation of spirit.

We could not approach within many yards of the fall: the cold was freezing, and the spray would have drenched us through in a few moments. So we contented ourselves with a seat upon huge stones at a respectful distance, and watched the water, which took all sorts of fantastic devices on its course from the top to the bottom, according to the power with which it fell over the edge. The whole surrounding scene was inexpressibly wild, rugged, and barren, but most beautiful, and with sunshine it would have been far more so. Mountains enclosed us in a great rocky rampart, impregnable, impassable: we were at the ends of the earth.

After a sufficiently long spell of gazing, we started again for Vetti. If the downward road had been hard work, what must be said of the

up-hill way in returning? A. and Jens took it as a very matter-of-fact affair: went up and up, and would have gone up and up very comfortably until Doomsday, I verily believe. It was quite exasperating Every now and then they turned round from their far-ahead vantage ground, and pityingly surveyed a struggling mortal who never thought to reach Vetti alive, and to whom they never offered help or consolation. But we got there at last, about eight o'clock, and after half an hour's rest were thankful for breakfast.

About nine, or soon after, Jens brought up the horse, and we started on our journey back to Aardal. What should I have done



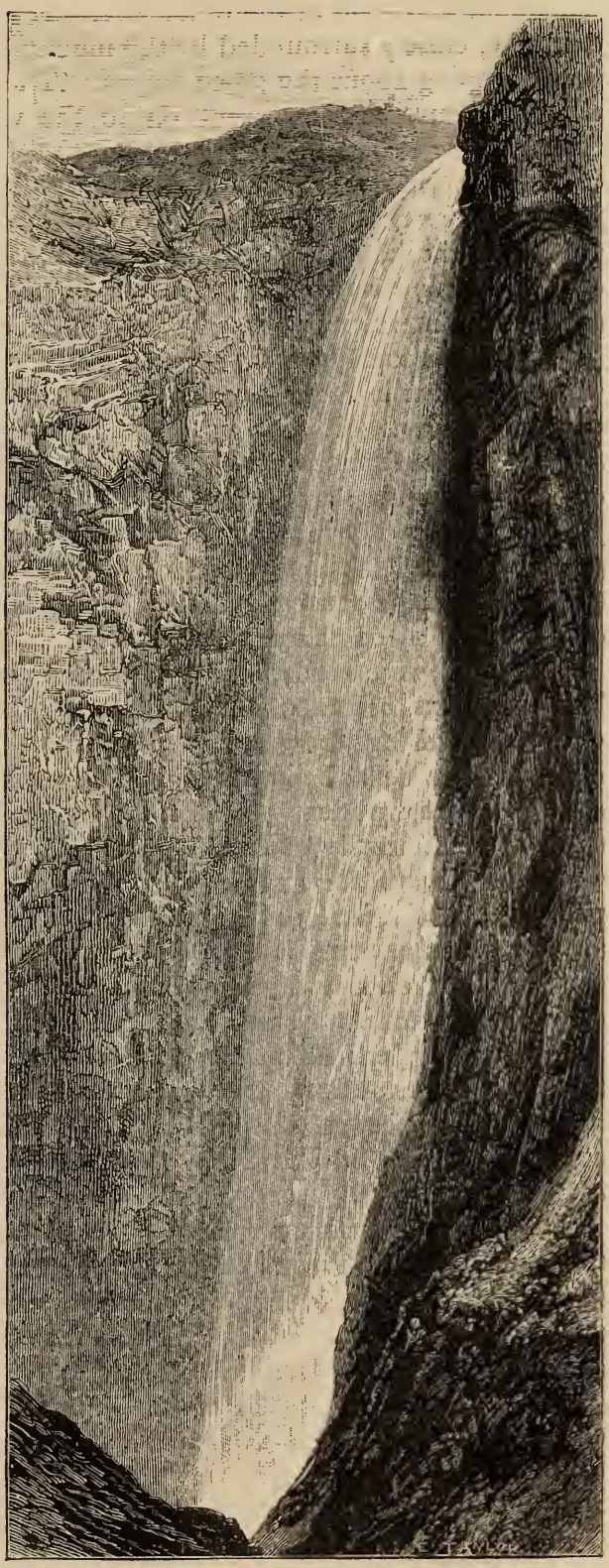
VETTI FARM.

without my gentle steed? Certainly have left my bones behind me at Vetti, or on the road.

Our return journey was nearly all down hill, and so much the more difficult for the horse to keep a firm footing. We soon got into the old path, and looked over the giddy precipice into the yawning depths, where still the noisy water ran its course. If I had cared little for my position yesterday, I cared still less for it to-day. Again we found ourselves in the same critical situation; and again, at one or two of the sharp turnings, the horse's head overhung one side of the terrible precipice, and his tail the other. Once more I felt myself suspended in mid-air, and went through the same terrific sensations. At one such spot, I remember well, the faithful steed came to a dead stand, unable to take his next step. His limbs trembled: I almost think his rider's did too. Had it been possible I should have dismounted; but to get down on the one side would have been to

send the horse over, and to get down on the other would have been to consign myself to the abyss: there was not an inch of ground to stand upon. In vain Jens called: he had to come back at last, and guide the horse round the curve.

In due time we reached the Gjelde Farm, and were half way to Aardal. It was Sunday—we had regretted having to travel on the Sunday, but there was no help for it—and the quiet of Sunday reigned in the little tenements. All the women folk were away, including the bread-baker. One of the youths we had seen ploughing yesterday was standing at the door, dressed in his best, and hailed Jens with acclamation. Jens seemed a very popular character wherever he went, and evidently well deserved the honour. Here we rested for twenty minutes or more; then off again, and in due time reached the farm where we had first taken the horse. No wonder I loved the gentle creature, after the apparent dangers we had gone through together, and parted from him with sorrow.



THE VETTIFOS.

Jens shouldered the saddle; we made for the boat, were soon on

the water, and soon at the other side. It was a glorious row across that lake, closely surrounded by the mountains, where sheep and goats were skipping about the green slopes. The saddle was put back in the boat-house, and we went on to the village. The villagers in their Sunday costumes looked smart and happy. The church was closed, for no service had been held there that day. In many parts of Norway there is perhaps one clergyman for four churches, so that each church gets a turn once a month. Again the superiority of the people was manifest; fine, well-built men and women, with handsome, intelligent faces.

At the inn old Jens Klingenberg came out and greeted us as if we had known him for six months, and had brought him some long-coveted favour. It was now two o'clock, but what with resting, and dinner, and chatting with Jens: falling into blunders, and falling out of them again: we were not off until some time past three. Poor Jens! in spite of his strong, thick boots, his feet were sore—he had performed the journey twice in forty-eight hours—and he told us that not for a king's ransom would he have started off again that day or the next. The charge for the whole thing was very moderate.

The men were ready, and we went down to the boat. A long, hard row was before them, for part of the way the tide would be contrary. Klingenberg and Jens escorted us down the pier in procession, gave us a hand-grasp, bade us come again, and we pushed off. Receding gradually, we left a vision of peace and beauty behind us. The little village in the quiet rest of the Sunday; the small white houses with their red roofs and green shutters; the tiny church with its quaint spire; the amphitheatre of hills in the back-ground: all formed a picture not to be forgotten. Jens, old and young, sat one on each side of the portico up the stone steps, watching us out of sight, until they became mere dots in the landscape, and the vision faded. Jens Klingenberg, senior and junior, I love you both for your honest, manly natures; for the traces of a quiet, straightforward life that shone out in both your faces: natures not so common in the world that they should be passed over without a word of record.

For six long hours we were rowing across the Sogne Fjord, amidst the gloomy mountains that were as grand and majestic to day as they had been yesterday, and grew more weird and mysterious as twilight fell. Something else fell too; rain in such torrents as we do not often see in England. Here and there perfect columns and spouts of water shot down from the clouds, athwart the mountains, and into the fjord. One of the men had a macintosh, and insisted on A.'s using it, whilst the man, rowing in shirt sleeves, got wet to the skin. I vow I could not have taken it. But we made it up to him afterwards, and no doubt he would be willing enough to go through a soaking again upon the same terms.

At length we came in sight of Laerdal, and presently landed upon

terra firma: glad enough to do so. My first question at the inn was for the landlord, and I asked for "Klingenberg" of the woman who was in the dining-room. I never made out that woman; there was something silent and uncanny about her; something secret and not above-board. She moved about with a slow quiet step, had a strange way of looking at you; would listen to what you had to say with a rude stony stare, and turn away without sign or token of having heard or heeded. But presently she would return with the commission executed. Even about the landlord himself there was something peculiar. He was comparatively young, good-looking, gentlemanly in appearance, and well dressed. But he had a way of frowning when speaking to you, which might perhaps be put down to his endeavours to catch what was said to him in English. He had not a way of making you welcome, and you left the inn without regret.

To-night, when I went and asked for "Klingenberg," the woman stared as usual, but disappeared much faster than was her wont. She went out, found the landlord and said to him: "The Englishmen have come back from Vetti, and one of them is asking all over the place for Klingenberg: do you think he is out of his mind?"

The landlord came in laughing, and the mystery was explained. He had misunderstood my former question—rather a habit of his. Klingenberg was only the name of the innkeeper at Aardal: the Norwegian for innkeeper was *Verten*.

So ended, on the whole, one of our pleasantest excursions in Norway, and one that I should feel very sorry to have passed over. We saw no scenery of its kind more severely grand and sublime than this mountain pass; and in spite of some disappointment in the Vettifos itself, we had been well repaid for our trouble. The whole two days' experience, with the figures of Jens Klingenberg and his son Jens standing out prominently in the foreground, and fading from view as we shot away into the broad arm of the Sogne Fjord, has left a lasting impression upon the memory. May we not have met for the last time!

We had not many hours' rest that night. The next morning at four o'clock we were to take the steamer down the Sogne Fjord to Bergen: thence start onward for the North Cape, cross the Arctic Circle, and enter the regions of the midnight sun.

"MR. SMITH."

I.

IT was about six o'clock upon a June evening, and the rays of the declining sun were still shining down hotly upon a small railway station in the midst of a sleepy, agricultural district. A long, low building, with a gravelled platform and one iron bench, enclosed in wooden palings, formed the whole erection; and all glittered incredibly white in the warm sunbeams.

To break the perfect repose of the rural scene there was but one moving figure, which was that of a rather small and stunted boy in a dark, quiet livery. His consequence, however, was sufficient for an army; as he strutted up and down the platform he was casting contemptuous glances at the low, white station-house, at the pastoral landscape, at the shining lines of rails. This superior being was presently aroused from the contemplation of his own greatness by the appearance of the train in the distance, when he immediately assumed a very business-like, wide-awake air. But the approach of the train had become known in other quarters also, and an official now issued from the low white building, carefully locking the door behind him.

Upon the stoppage of the train it became apparent at once that there were but two passengers for Redbrook—one, a stout country-woman with a market basket upon her arm; the other a young man, who sprang briskly from his compartment, and made his way to the luggage van. Leaving the country-woman to get her fat self and her basket out as best she might, the solitary official bustled up to the first-class passenger.

"Your luggage, sir? Was it labelled *Redbrook?* What name? 'Smith,' did you say, sir? Thank you."

But now the small and important servant came up, touching his hat, and speaking with a great air.

"Allow me, sir," said he, taking a bag from the young man's hand. "What luggage have you? I'll see to it; the carriage is on the other side, sir."

Notwithstanding the re-assuring air and words, the traveller waited to see his portmanteau correctly out of the van; and then, glad of the fresh evening breeze, strolled round in the direction indicated by the servant. As soon as he had rounded the station-house, the young man, by name Jeffrey Smith, perceived a pony-carriage in waiting, and, seated in it, a young lady. She was attired in a plain print dress with only a few knots of pale-coloured ribbon here and there to relieve its monotony; upon her head was a wide straw hat,

as simple as the rest of her attire; and for her face, its chief merit lay in its youthfulness and brilliancy of colouring. But altogether the girlish figure, the low carriage, and the rural landscape made a very refreshing spectacle to Mr. Smith, wearied with long confinement, the worries and excitements of London.

Mr. Smith advanced hesitatingly, not sure who the young lady might prove to be. Her words, however, at once informed him. Directly she had caught sight of his advancing form, she extended her hand and spoke with frank cordiality; her voice being as pleasant and refined as her appearance.

"How do you do, Mr. Smith? My father was so sorry not to be able to come himself to welcome you, but he had an important meeting to attend this afternoon."

Mr. Smith took the outstretched hand, thinking within himself that he should enjoy the drive quite as much in the company of his host's daughter as in that of his host personally; perhaps more so.

"Will you get in?" said the girl next. "Thomas, I hope, is seeing to your luggage. The waggon will bring it."

"I am being the occasion of a great deal of trouble."

"Not at all; the waggon had already to come for some farm implement, so that need not be upon your mind," answered the young lady in an independent, business-like way that Mr. Smith soon found was a characteristic of hers. "Is all right, Thomas?" she asked of the servant, who now came up and clambered to his place; upon which the young lady touched up the ponies, and away they went at a fair pace.

"There are no lions to point out to you, Mr. Smith; so that unless you can admire a quiet country landscape, I am afraid you will be disappointed in the neighbourhood."

There was a scent of the hay-harvest in the air; the tall ragged-robins in the hedges nodded their pink heads; the delicate meadow-sweet held its dainty flowers erect; the long grasses waved gracefully; the trees, singly and in groups, stood out in deep dark masses of foliage; a brown stream glided through the fields, beside which the cattle rested, ruminating in full content; all was rich, peaceful, pastoral, and the young man looked around him quite satisfied with his position and the prospect.

"It may be a great deficiency in taste," answered he, laughing; "but I am not sure that I do not like a rich agricultural country like this better than the grandeur of wilder scenery."

"Of course I like the country; I never find it dull; but I am afraid of our not being able to find you much amusement."

Jeffrey was beginning to deprecate this view of the case, when he was interrupted by the ponies being pulled up. They had overtaken the old woman, who had been the other passenger in the train by which he had arrived.

"Well, Nanny! a warm evening. Shall we take your basket for

you? You can call for it at the house, and get some supper as you go by."

"Thank you, Miss Lettice; 'tis warm," answered the old woman, wiping her heated face, and preparing to disburden herself.

"Here, Thomas," said the young lady to the servant, who was looking on disdainfully with folded arms, "help Nanny up with her basket." And at the command of his mistress he had no choice but to unfold his arms and assist the old woman, who was anxiously covering up one corner of her basket.

"What have you got there, Nanny? A new cap?"

"Yes, miss; and will you see as those maids of yours don't get fittin' un on."

"Very well, Nanny," said the girl laughing, as she laid her whip lightly upon the ponies' shining flanks, and started afresh. "I think that is only Nanny's delicate way of putting the case; it is in reality myself whom she is afraid of not being able to resist that tempting adornment."

"I am not sure that her misgivings are without reason," said Smith, smiling in his turn. To feel otherwise than friendly towards this frank girl was as impossible as it would be to treat her with other than the truest respect. "I shall make it my first duty to look after Nanny's interests."

"Pray do. Come, my beauties, we must be getting on," added she, shaking the ponies' reins encouragingly. "I hope you did not mind my stopping? We try to help our neighbours here in the country; we have not much else to think of," she added apologetically, turning round and glancing into her companion's face.

"I was amused at the idea for a moment; but I think it was a very good thought of yours," answered the young man warmly.

A short space more of the country road with its flowery banks, and the carriage turned off, and bowled smoothly up an avenue of chestnuts through a park of small extent; and in a very few minutes more they pulled up at a low, straggling house. It was an irregular building with a high peaked roof and many angles, but perhaps in its main outline it might be said to follow the form of three sides of a quadrangle, having at one bend a short square tower, which gave dignity to the structure and somewhat relieved its low, rambling character.

The door stood wide open to admit the summer air, fragrant with the balmy breath of many roses; and the girl, giving the reins to the groom, stepped from the carriage and conducted Smith across the wide hall to a room at the rear of the house.

"My father will most likely be in the library. Yes," said she, flinging wide the doors after a preliminary peep within, glancing over her shoulder to the young man who was following her.

"Here is Mr. Smith, papa!"

Her father, who had been seated in his study chair reading the

newspaper, laid it down upon the entrance of his daughter; and taking off his spectacles, rose to greet his guest with a bland smile of welcome upon his face. But as his eye fell upon his visitor, the urbane expression of his countenance changed to one of blank surprise, and he drew himself up stiffly.

"*Who are you?*" cried the old gentleman.

Jeffrey, upon his part, was little less taken aback at his reception. "Is Mr. Lorimer not at home?"

"How should I know? What do you mean, sir?"

"Is Mr. Lorimer not expecting me? Where is he?"

"In his own house a dozen miles from here, I should imagine!" cried the little old gentleman; his face pink, and every hair upon his white, woolly head seeming to bristle with pugnacity.

"'In his own house a dozen miles from here!'" echoed Jeffrey Smith, blankly. "I can't understand you."

"I can't understand *you*, sir!" retorted the other.

"Stay, there is some mistake," said Lettice, who had been looking in amazement from one to the other. "Mr. Smith, whom did you come to see?"

"Mr. Lorimer, of course," answered the young man promptly, turning to the girl with evident relief.

"But we have hardly a visiting acquaintance with them! Why come here?"

"I have never been there, but it is a place called The Cedars, and I thought I was coming to it now; is not this it?"

What reply the young lady might have given, can never be known, for the old gentleman, Mr. Warburton, took up the subject again. "I see it all!" cried he, throwing up his hands. "The boy should have gone to the Cedars, and has come here six miles out of his way!"

"Then this is not Mr. Lorimer's! How stupid! I was to have gone there on a week's visit."

"Most extraordinary to me," Mr. Warburton muttered to himself, "how a person does not know where he is going, and takes care he gets there."

The colour rose to Jeffrey Smith's forehead; and he was none the less annoyed that he felt the blood mounting to his face. "I am sorry for any inconvenience that I may have caused you, sir," he said; "and I think now that I had better lose no time in starting for my destination."

"Tut, tut, tut, young man, don't mount the high horse; sit down, sit down; I was only thinking of you. For ourselves, if we have not got the right visitor, we are very glad of the wrong one."

"You are very kind, but I will take up no more of your time. Besides, I imagine I shall get no conveyance in these rustic parts, therefore the sooner I start the better," answered Smith, melting into his own genial self at the other's more cordial manner.

"Nonsense! there is no conveyance to be had here, I cannot

send you such a distance, for one of my horses is lame; so you must make yourself comfortable for the present. You came of your own free will and choice, and you must stay now against it. It would be an excellent joke, too, but for poor Smith cooling his heels on Redbrook platform."

"I don't think, papa, he could have arrived," said Lettice, who had laid aside her straw hat, and seated herself beside the table.

"You were expecting a friend by this train?—Of course," added Jeffrey, correcting himself; "or the mistake could not have arisen about me. No person got out of the train but myself and the old woman with the cap," smiling at Lettice. "I looked about me thoroughly, so I can assure you no one was there."

"Very well, all's well that ends well. Ring the bell, my dear, for this gentleman to be shown to his room—he can have Smith's," said Mr. Warburton, as impulsively hospitable now as he had been unbearably irate before. With all his simplicity and impulsiveness he was not without some judgment, and he had taken a liking for this young stranger with his good looks and gentlemanly bearing: and was honestly pleased to have him within his doors.

Miss Warburton had kept quite silent and aloof throughout the discussion; but when he at length yielded to her father's persuasions, Smith could not resist stealing a glance in her direction to read her mind, and he fancied that he could detect a faint smile of satisfaction dimpling her pretty mouth. So in improved spirits he proceeded to his room, where he was informed his luggage was already. In twenty minutes his toilette was complete, and he made his way back to the room in which he had been received. Quick, though, as he considered he had been in dressing, he found Miss Warburton had been yet quicker, for as he opened the door, he heard her clear voice in conversation.

"Well, I must say I thought he looked rather young."

"I should think so. How you could take that lad to be the professor ——" Mr. Warburton was beginning, when he was awakened to the fact of Jeffrey Smith's presence in the room.

A slight flush dawned upon Lettice's fair cheeks at the unexpected entrance of their subject of conversation, but she faced the position frankly.

"Yes," she began with her low sweet laugh; "we were talking of you. I was just saying that, although no doubt of your identity entered my mind, you did not fulfil my ideal of a learned professor."

"I think that unkind, Miss Warburton. You should have left me under the illusion that I looked an embodiment of wisdom and erudition."

"How did the mistake arise? How was it that you came from the station with me?"

"I cannot tell you exactly; I have been thinking over the circumstances, and I can only remember that your servant came up and

took my bag from my hand, saying the carriage was waiting for me outside the station."

"I knew it!" cried Mr. Warburton. "I knew that young rascal had something to do with it; he is at the bottom of every piece of mischief. We'll have him here to give an account of himself."

"What is the use, papa?" said Lettice, laughing "He will only prove everybody to be in the wrong but himself."

At this moment dinner was announced, Miss Warburton being given into Smith's charge; with which arrangement he was well pleased. The more he saw of Lettice, the more he was charmed with her vivacity and intelligence. She was also prettier than he had at first thought her, now that he saw her with her pretty hair uncovered, and her bright, youthful face set off by evening dress. This was as simple as her outdoor attire had been, but it was of some shining white material, and it left her round white throat and arms exposed to view, and set off her light and graceful figure. There was a slight dash of independence in her manner and speech, but it was only sufficient to lend a certain piquancy to her remarks. He had a considerable experience of her powers of entertainment in the course of the evening, for Mr. Warburton fell asleep immediately upon their adjournment to the drawing-room.

By the help of some music, and Miss Warburton's conversation, the evening flew by, and Jeffrey Smith was first recalled to a sense of time by Lettice ringing for chamber candles, and bidding himself and her father good-night.

The slight stir had awakened the latter, and he now undertook the office of entertainer.

"Do you smoke?" asked the old gentleman, blinking his eyes and pushing his fingers through the snow-white wool that covered his head; as he sat very erect and looked at Smith.

"Not regularly; but when I am shown a bad example, I sometimes take a cigar."

"Very well, I'll set you that bad example; we'll have just one whiff before going to bed. But we must go to my sanctum. Do you notice what a queer house this is?" asked Mr. Warburton as, followed by his guest, he shuffled along an extensive corridor to a far-off room.

"It covers a great deal of ground, surely."

"Yes, for it is built entirely on the ground floor, but for the small tower that I added; my daughter considers the rooms in it hers, the windows look over the woods and are pleasant; at any rate, they are her choice. The man who lived here before me, and for whom the house was built, was blind. You recollect your bedroom, I suppose: it lies over there," the old gentleman concluded, pointing over his shoulder.

"Yes, I marked its position, at the end of the passage, past the tower staircase."

"Right! now I think I can give you a cigar that you will enjoy."

II.

By eleven o'clock that night Mr. Smith was in bed; but twelve, sounding from some clock in the neighbourhood, discovered him still awake; and when the single stroke of one in due time came trembling through the still summer air, his restlessness had only increased. This wakefulness was becoming oppressive, and he at last set to courting the perverse and fickle goddess in sober earnest, and strove to remember all the methods that he had heard recommended for obtaining sleep. He had been told that counting was an infallible charm: well! Jeffrey reckoned up the National Debt, and was as wide awake as though he had been Chancellor of the Exchequer. Then he remembered that the true method of composing oneself was to fix the mind upon a single idea, such as sheep successively jumping a hedge. Accordingly, he saw the flocks of Abraham over the gap he had conjured up in his imagination, with the result that he was rather more lively than before. Then he tried repeating poetry and went hunting for a missing line through half the English poets. And last he essayed the reiteration of a word again and again until at length it had no more meaning or sense than the changes rung upon a bell. Stop! at this rate he felt he should soon land in hopeless imbecility. He would rise, walk about, read, occupy himself in some manner; and springing up he sought a light. The matches were not to be found, but there might be a match or two in his own bag. This he recollected to have left in the dressing-room which adjoined his bed-chamber. The window here was not screened by thick dark blinds as those of the sleeping apartment were, and he soon found his bag: when, as he was feeling amongst its fittings for his match-box, he became conscious of a peculiar smell and sound in the room. The door had been left overnight accidentally ajar, and through this opening the strange influences stole. The next moment he was convinced of the cause.

The place was on fire!

Jeffrey ventured out and looked forth; and there at the end of the passage, rolling onward to meet him, was a volume of white smoke. Without a moment's loss of time he turned back into his room; and, hastily assuming some of his clothes, hurried out again. Perfectly ignorant which rooms were tenanted and which not, he knocked at every door, shouting "Fire! fire!" He himself pressed on to the immediate scene of the conflagration. The origin of the fire he could not discover; but upon turning the corner of the long corridor it was apparent that the tower stairs were burning. The column of smoke was now very dense, but the flames seemed to be issuing from beneath this staircase. Good Heavens! Was it not here that he had been told Miss Warburton slept? How far had the fire reached? Had

it already done its work of destruction? Before Jeffrey's sight swept a vision of the girl as he had seen her last night, bright, sunny, beautiful, and now possibly a mere heap of charred and blackened ruin. It spurred him on to instantaneous effort. He made an attempt to ascend; the smoke was blinding, the hot air swept his face with scorching fierceness; but the stairs still afforded firm and secure footing. The flames, however, were licking with ominous greed at the light wooden baluster and its supports. He gained the door which he supposed must be that of Miss Warburton's room, and, after a hasty knock, turned the handle. The door yielded. He could make out the white bed, could almost catch the shimmer of the golden hair upon the pillow even in that dim light.

"Miss Warburton! waken!" he cried. And then thinking the true cause of the disturbance would be less alarming to the girl than the strange presence in her room, he added: "Don't be frightened; but the house is on fire."

Jeffrey guessed that she was not the kind of woman to go into hysterics, or faint, or do anything else absurd; he had reckoned upon her showing courage and presence of mind, and he found himself right in his estimate.

"Yes; who is it? What is the matter?" she said, bewildered, but sitting erect, and speaking calmly.

"It is I, Miss Warburton; there is a fire in the house. I do not think it is much, but the stairs are burning. Will you come at once?"

"Yes, but ——"

"Don't wait! Just wrap yourself in something woollen," said he, walking to the door and opening it in readiness, but the next moment he shut it to again. The flames had already gained the very lintels.

"Quick, Miss Warburton! There is not a moment to lose!" cried he sharply.

The next moment Lettice had glided up to his side where he stood waiting for her. He took her hand to lead her forward; she was very ready and composed, but Jeffrey could feel that she trembled nervously. Holding her fingers now in a firmer grasp to re-assure her, he opened the door and stepped out on the small landing.

"Not through there! not through there!" she cried, drawing back with a violent shudder at the sight of the smoke and flames.

Seeing her dismay and reluctance Mr. Smith spoke to her hurriedly. "Our only alternative is the window; is there a verandah or anything of that sort below it?"

"No, nothing."

"No projection of any kind to climb out upon?"

"None," she answered, trying to steady her voice; "the wall falls sheer down to the ground."

"Come, then; you shall not be hurt if I can help it. Escape is easy enough if only the stairs be stone: at all events, they are but

a short flight," said he encouragingly; but at the same time he stole a glance of much anxiety at the girl.

She was only protected by some thin wrapper, her little naked white feet were simply thrust into a pair of slippers, her fair hair hung in a fleecy cloud over her shoulders. Plenty for those hungry flames to feed upon; little to resist their voracity.

Darting back into the room, Smith seized a blanket from the bed, and rolling it round her, lifted her speechless with astonishment into his arms, and dashed right on. Burdened as he was, and blinded by the smoke, he stumbled on, never hesitating until he reached the base, where what seemed to be a solid wall of fire withstood his progress. But it was too late for hesitation, too late to go back; and, with a more fervent prayer for help than ever he had uttered in his life before, he plunged on. A moment later they stood safe beyond the reach of the flames. Safe upon the solid ground, safe as by a miracle; safe, though with hearts that yet throbbed quickly from the late sense of peril. And deeply thankful; one at least had never tasted the full sweetness of existence until that moment of blessed relief.

Setting his precious burden down, Jeffrey Smith staggered back against the wall, more exhausted by his exertions, and more hurt by the scorching breath of the flames, than he cared to own. He was aroused by the sound of a soft voice speaking to him.

"I know what you have done, Mr. Smith; I know that you have saved my life at the risk of your own."

"Not at all; it is nothing," answered the young man quickly.

"It is so much that I can say nothing," said the girl, looking up at him, her eyes full of tears, her tones broken by emotion.

"There was no one else sleeping in that part of the house, was there?" asked Jeffrey, starting up, struck by a sudden thought.

"No! oh, no!" cried Lettice, laying her hand detainingly upon his arm, fearful that he was going to explore afresh.

"I was not thinking of starting upon a second expedition," said he smiling; and taking her hand, he held it in his in a warm clasp.

The next moment they were interrupted by the awakened household assembling. One by one the inmates of the house came trooping up in every form of unfinished and peculiar attire: but all worked with such a will, and the supply of water was so good, that the fire was extinguished by the time day dawned. Not, however, before the staircase was wholly consumed, and Miss Warburton's rooms partly destroyed, and wholly spoiled by the double action of the smoke and the hose from the garden, which had been brought to play upon the conflagration.

The world of nature had been some time astir, and the sun was some height in the heavens when Jeffrey retired to bed for the second time, but he now slept soundly until nine o'clock. Hastening then, he found awaiting him in the breakfast-room Mr. Warburton, walking up

and down in a state of great agitation. Seated before the urn was Lettice herself, looking as fresh as though she had passed the night in tranquil slumber upon a bed of roses, and had stolen some of their bloom and sweetness for herself.

Mr. Warburton hailed Jeffrey as his daughter's deliverer, making many attempts to thank him for the great service he had rendered them, but as regularly broke down: and as upon each occasion he wrung Smith's hand almost to the point of dislocating his shoulder, the latter was not sorry when he abandoned the endeavour to express his gratitude, and proposed that breakfast should be proceeded with.

No sooner was the meal over than Jeffrey and Lettice were invited to be present at the inquiry Mr. Warburton was about to institute into the cause of the fire. He was not going to have his house burned down about his ears and not know the reason why. So the entire staff of servants was summoned, and the inquiry opened with great formality.

Each of the men-servants separately denied all knowledge of the matter: but when it came to the women-servants' turn to be interrogated, Mrs. Bennett, the housekeeper, a homely old woman, but a privileged person, who had evidently been on thorns for ten minutes past to get in a word, answered with great fluency and energy—

"No, sir; I didn't do it; but I know who did. 'Twas that bad, wicked girl, Hetty."

"What! your niece, Hetty!" cried Mr. Warburton, astonished.

"Yes, sir," assented this Spartan relative; "'twas she as set fire to the house, and tried to burn us all up in our beds."

"Come here, Hetty."

In answer to the summons there came forward a plump-faced country lass, shaking and crying, but not looking altogether the murderer and incendiary she had been represented to be.

"Now, then, what have you got to say?" asked her master, with the air of a judge to a prisoner at the bar.

The only reply of the culprit was a fresh burst of tears.

Miss Warburton came to the rescue. "Look at me, Hetty," said she, in a kind and gentle voice, "and tell us how it happened."

The girl turned her moist eyes upon the young lady with some appearance of relief. "Well, miss, Jenny Rowlands's little girl had a sore throat ——"

"Tut, tut, tut," broke in the old Squire with his familiar expression of impatience. "Tut, tut, tut! We don't want to hear about the health of the parish. I want to know why my house is to be burnt down, and Miss Lettice killed between the fire and the fright."

Mr. Smith and 'Miss Lettice' looked up at this ghastly picture; and, their glances meeting, the majesty of the court was nearly being broken by a peal of laughter.

As soon as she could regain a fitting gravity of countenance, Miss

Warburton resumed her prompting, "Put down your apron and go on, Hetty," said she to the girl, who was pleating up the hem of her apron nervously, when she was not using it as a mop to wipe her stained and heated cheeks.

"I was telling you, miss, Jenny Rowlands came up for some black-currant jam, and aunt sent me to the store-room behind the stairs for it."

"Now put the blame upon me!" cried Mrs. Bennett, throwing up her hands with a gesture that spoke volumes for the injustice and iniquity of the world.

"No, aunt, I'm not; I'm only telling how 'twas. And I was obliged, miss, to fetch a light to read the labels on the pots, and I left the candle behind me on the window. I suppose I forgot it 'cause it was so light outside."

"Very well. Now, Hetty, you must promise to be very careful for the future."

"I will, miss, I will," cried the penitent Hetty, applying the apron more vigorously than ever to her eyes.

"Yes; recollect that a great deal of damage has been done, and it might have been much more serious, costing some of us our lives, but for the goodness of God. You must take a warning from this."

"Indeed I'll never look at a candle again."

"An undertaking you'll find it difficult to keep," said Miss Warburton, laughing. "You can all go."

"My dear," said her father as soon as the servants had dispersed, "you should have let me speak a word. We shall be having the house in flames every other night when they see how easily we take this."

"Nonsense! Hetty has had a warning for life. Besides, papa, you would only have made us all laugh. Now then, what shall we do? Shall we take Mr. Smith to see the gardens, such as they are?"

"He shall see my pigs. *They* are worth looking at, I can promise you, Smith. Come along."

But neither flowers nor pigs were destined to receive Smith's admiration that day; for just as the three were passing out, a carriage drove up to the door with Jeffrey's lawful possessors, full of apologies and explanations for having been late in arriving at the station the previous day.

Mr. Warburton at once entered a vehement protest against his departure. "No, no; we've got you and mean to keep you. Mind, you came of your own choice," added the little old gentleman, chuckling. He seemed to think there was an excellent joke in this latter fact.

To Jeffrey the fun of it was not so patent. Even with the later events he coloured somewhat at the recollection of the method of

his arrival. "Yes, I have to thank you for your kindness and hospitality to a mere intruder."

"No, no, no; dear me, dear me! How little we know what a day may bring forth—thought your coming so odd; it was the finger of Providence that led you here."

Jeffrey did not exactly see the reasoning, but he kept the sentiment within his own breast; only maintaining that he must fulfil his engagement with the Lorimers, and spend the next week at their house.

So he departed, carrying with him the open, loudly-expressed regrets of his late host; and a faint glance of wistful disappointment from Miss Warburton, that was instantly changed for a smile and a jest when she perceived his gaze bent upon her. But the sequel proved that he might quite as well have remained at Redbrook, for next day and every day found him calling there.

"Somehow I feel an interest in those people. Lettice Warburton is such a nice girl," he allowed, and deceived himself by the candour of the admission. "Not the sort of woman to fall hopelessly, stupidly, head-over-ears in love with; no dazzling beauty to rave about; but just a good, honest English girl, taking kindly thought for an old woman, rescuing a poor servant from trouble, carrying life and sunshine everywhere: who could help liking her?"

It was the final morning of his stay in the neighbourhood, and he had ridden over to Redbrook early to make his adieux. The room into which he was shown was empty when he entered; but the next moment Lettice glided in, her cheeks and eyes brightened by the fresh morning air, her hands full of flowers, with which to replenish the vases: a task she daily performed herself.

"I did not know you were here," she cried, upon seeing Jeffrey. "I cannot give you a hand, because both are full. Have you been waiting long?"

"No, I have hardly been here a moment. I called to say good-bye, as I am leaving to-morrow."

"Ah!"—Miss Warburton's hands were disengaged now, for the flowers had dropped from them, and were rolling in a glittering cataract down her white robe to the ground. The brief sigh and exclamation might have been given to the catastrophe, or to the news just imparted by Mr. Smith.

The next moment she was speaking lightly. "How stupid of me! Did you say you were leaving? I thought you were going to stay some time longer; my father is under the firm impression that you would pay us a visit before deserting the neighbourhood altogether."

Jeffrey made no answer: he was silently gathering up the scattered blossoms and replacing them in her lap. Something in the last few minutes had shown him his heart. What a fool he had been in talking about *liking* this girl! It burst upon him, with the suddenness of a startling revelation, what a blank life would be without her.

"Will you give me one of those flowers?" he asked; as, his work ended, he stood waiting beside her.

Lettice had in her fingers two or three purple pansies; she stretched out her hand and offered them to him without a word.

"Heartsease! I shall need that when I am gone."

A slight frown contracted Miss Warburton's smooth white brow; then she looked up with a gentle reproach. "I did not think it was your habit to talk nonsense."

"It is not nonsense," said Jeffrey, eagerly. "Miss Warburton! you are dearer to me than life. I have been too stupid to know it, but I think I have loved you from the first moment I saw you."

No reply from Miss Warburton, save that her head drooped a little lower over the flowers.

"Give me a word of hope, dearest. Don't let me go away miserable; speak to me—Lettice.'

"What can I say? And you are so impatient—Jeffrey."

It was enough for the waiting, anxious lover.

"Lettice, may I go and speak to your father now?" asked Jeffrey presently, when his raptures had somewhat subsided.

"You would not be anxious for it," answered she between smiles and tears, "if you knew the treatment other suitors have met with at his hands."

Inwardly quaking, himself, at the ordeal, Jeffrey sought out Mr. Warburton and told his story plainly.

"Never heard of anything so ridiculous in my life!" burst out the little old gentleman. "You saved her life, and now, forsooth! feel obliged to marry her. Off with you, and leave me in peace, and never mention anything so absurd again!——But, Smith!" he called out later to the young man, who was turning away baulked and dispirited. "Recollect that any time you feel disposed to pay us a visit, you'll find a hearty welcome here. And perhaps, perhaps—mind, I make no rash promises—but perhaps, if you like to come and talk to me about Lettice in twenty years' time, when you have both grown a little older and wiser, I may listen to you."

The wedding took place, however, in a good deal less than twenty years. It was celebrated with fitting magnificence; the bride was lovely, the bridegroom handsome, and there was a crowd of wedding-guests rivalling a flock of tropical birds in splendour of plumage. But Master Thomas considered that he, in a new suit of livery and a favour nearly as large as himself, was the central point of elegance and the crowning pinnacle of glory.

THE ARCHITECT'S WIFE.

I.

TOWARDS the middle of the fourteenth century, Toledo was invested by the troops of Don Enrique de Trastamara, the brother of that king, called by some the Cruel and by others the Just, to whose cause the Toledans were devoted, and for whom they were defending with conspicuous valour their native city. Many a time and oft had the loyal and brave denizens of the "City of Swords" sallied forth across the magnificent bridge of San Martin, and, throwing themselves with irresistible impetuosity against the besieging forces encamped in the Cigarrales, had inflicted on them severe loss. Indeed, so disastrous had these frequent sallies proved to the army of Don Enrique, that he determined to destroy the bridge, a structure of great beauty, and conspicuous even amongst the many architectural monuments possessed by Toledo.

But however indifferent Don Enrique was to the charms of the bridge of San Martin, it had a special value in the eyes of the Toledans, from the fact that it formed their only means of access—unless indeed by crossing the Tagus by boat—to the Cigarrales, that Champs Elysées of Toledo, whose praises have been sung by well-nigh all the poets of Castille.

One night the soldiers of Don Enrique might have been seen hewing down the magnificent trees which surrounded their camp, and piling them on the bridge of San Martin; but with such care and precautions against surprise was the work of devastation carried on, that not until day was dawning did the Toledans suspect the loss they were about to sustain. Then, indeed, a horrible glare overspread their beloved Cigarrales, now laid waste, lit up the waters of the Tagus, brought out into mournful distinctness the ruins of the Palace of Roderick, the last Visigothic king of Spain, and illuminated the Moorish tower which still overlooks the river.

The Toledans, roused by this sinister splendour, hastened to rescue their favourite bridge from the imminent ruin which menaced its existence; but in vain was all their haste, for a fearful crash, which echoed mournfully through the caves and windings of the Tagus, told them that the bridge was no more.

When the sun rose to gild the dome of the kingly city, the Toledan damsels who crowded down to the banks of the river to fill their jars with the clear, fresh water, returned with them still empty, but with hearts full of sorrow and indignation, for the stream of the Tagus was

rushing along, turbulent and muddy, whirling round and round in its boiling eddies the still smoking ruins of the bridge of San Martin.

The popular indignation knew no bounds, for the bridge, as we have said already, was the only direct means of access to the Cigarrales, the lovely pleasure grounds which the Toledans had inherited from the Moors, together with all the veritable passion for trees and flowers for which those barbarians, as they have been misnamed, were so conspicuous. The endurance of the besieged, which was beginning to fail them, gained renewed strength from the outrage, and the army of Trastamara speedily found itself the object of a series of furious onslaughts, which ended in a complete and disastrous defeat, and watered the Cigarrales with streams of blood.

II.

At the time our tale opens, many years had passed away since the tyrant of Montiel had destroyed the bridge of San Martin. Dignitaries both of Church and State had vied with each other in their endeavours to replace it by a structure worthy of it, both in beauty of outline and solidity. But the skill and care of the most celebrated architects, Christian and Moorish alike, had been altogether wanting in success on account of the rapidity of the stream, which carried away in its impetuous course the framework of wood and the pillars of stone before the arches of the bridge could be completed.

Don Pedro Tenorio, Archbishop of Toledo, to whom that city owed as much, if not more than to its kings, then made application throughout all the cities and towns of Spain for an architect capable of rebuilding the bridge of San Martin: but for a long time without response.

One day, however, a man and woman, complete strangers to the place, entered Toledo by the Cambron Gate, and after carefully inspecting the ruins of the bridge, fixed, for their residence, upon an empty house not far from them. A few hours afterwards the man might have been seen wending his way towards the palace of the Archbishop.

At that time the prelate was in the habit of receiving a large concourse of Church dignitaries, savants, and others, who were attracted to Toledo by the fame of his wisdom and goodness, and with whom he delighted to surround himself. His joy was indeed great when one of his attendants informed him that an architect from another kingdom requested the honour of an interview. The Archbishop hastened to give the desired audience, and the stranger was ushered into his presence.

The architect was still young, but thought and misfortune, had left

their traces on his countenance and rendered him in appearance prematurely grave.

After kindly returning his respectful salutation, Don Pedro motioned him to a seat directly in front of his own.

"Sir," said the stranger, "my name, which must be entirely strange to you, is Juan de Arévalo, and I am an architect by profession."

"You have come hither, attracted no doubt by the notice which we in Toledo have circulated throughout Spain, calling for an architect sufficiently skilful to rebuild the bridge of San Martin?"

"That is so."

"Are you aware of all the difficulties of the work?"

"I not only know them, your grace, but I conceive myself capable of overcoming them."

"Where have you studied?" asked the Archbishop.

"In Salamanca."

"And what buildings are there to which you can point in proof of your skill?"

"None."

The Archbishop could not help showing a certain amount of disappointment and want of confidence. The stranger noticed this, and hastened to explain.

"I was a soldier in my youth, but illness rendered me unfit for the hardships of a military life; and, returning to Castille, my native country, I devoted myself with ardour to the study of architecture, first of all theoretically and then practically."

"I regret extremely that you are not able to specify any building in proof of your ability," remarked the Archbishop.

"There are some both on the Tormes and the Douro which should speak in my praise, though the credit of them is claimed by others."

"I do not understand you."

"I was poor and unknown," said the stranger, "and when, unaided, I found myself in a position to gain food and renown, I was compelled to content myself with the food and leave the renown to others."

"I am very sorry indeed that you have no credentials wherewith to satisfy us that if we confide in you we shall not trust in vain."

"I have one which at all events may satisfy your grace."

"And that is?"

"My life."

"Explain yourself," cried the Archbishop

"When the supports of the centre arch of the new bridge of San Martin are removed, the architect who designed it will be found standing on the keystone of the arch."

"I agree to your terms," replied the Archbishop, quite won over by the self-confidence of the stranger.

"And I will fulfil them," returned the architect.

The Archbishop held out his hand to the visitor, and the latter returned to his house with a look of evident joy.

The lady who had accompanied Juan de Arévalo to Toledo, young and still lovely in spite of the traces of suffering on her face, awaited him with anxiety, and hurried to meet him at the door.

"Catalina, my own!" exclaimed the architect, embracing his wife, "amidst the monuments of art which beautify Toledo, there will be one destined to transmit to posterity the name of Juan de Arévalo."

III.

No longer could the Toledans say, as they approached the Tagus by its rugged and almost precipitous banks, where in former days artificial caves had marked the gardens of Florinda—no longer could the Toledans say: "Here *was* the bridge of San Martin," for a new bridge, securely surrounded with massive supports and endless scaffolding, was already raised on the ruins of the old one.

The Archbishop, Don Pedro Tenorio, and the Toledans, high and low, overwhelmed with all sorts of presents the fortunate and clever architect who had succeeded in spanning the river in spite of its furious current, and notwithstanding the hazardous nature of the stupendous work.

On the eve of the Festival of San Ildefonso, patron saint of the city, Juan de Arévalo announced formally to the Archbishop that in order to complete his work there remained only the removal of the scaffolding from the three arches of the bridge, the openings of which were still blocked up with intricate and yet sturdy masses of pine wood.

The satisfaction of the Archbishop and the people was extreme. It is true that the removal of all the framework on which the massive but artistically chiselled blocks of stone appeared to rest was a work of great danger, but the tranquil air of the architect, who was committed to await the perilous ordeal on the keystone of the centre arch, inspired everyone with confidence.

The solemn benediction and opening of the new bridge of San Martin was announced to take place on the following day, with prayers and glad peals from all the bells of Toledo. From the heights which overlook the course of the Tagus, the Toledans beheld with joy and emotion their beloved Cigarrales, which for so many years had remained sad, solitary, and almost deserted, but, ere the setting of another sun, were, they fondly hoped, destined to recover their pristine cheerfulness and beauty.

It was toward midnight, when Juan de Arévalo ascended the scaf-

folding of the centre arch of the bridge, with the object of seeing that everything was in readiness for the morrow's critical work, and as he slowly mounted upwards he gleefully hummed the refrain of some familiar song. Suddenly the song ceased from his lips, the joy disappeared from his countenance, and he returned to his house full of sadness and despair.

Catalina, his devoted and faithful wife, ran with cheerful face and loving words to meet him on the threshold of their home, but as she saw the look of anguish on her husband's countenance, her cheeks caught the pallor of his.

"Tell me, for Heaven's sake," she cried, "are you ill?"

"No, dear love," replied Juan, endeavouring to conceal his despair.

"You cannot deceive me," returned his wife. "Your face alone tells me that it is so."

"The night is cold and my work has been too much for me ——"

"Come, then, come to the fire," interrupted Catalina, "where the warmth and your supper will restore you to health and gladness."

"Gladness!" murmured Juan in a tone of deep dejection, whilst his wife turned to prepare their supper by the hearth, on which the oak chips crackled and sparkled merrily in the blaze.

Juan made a great effort to conceal his sadness and want of appetite, but he could not succeed.

"For the first time in your life you are hiding something from me!" said Catalina at last. "Am I no longer worthy of that love and confidence which up to now you have ever bestowed upon me?"

"Do not add to my trouble, Catalina, by doubting my love for you."

"There can be no love where there is no confidence."

"For your sake and mine do not seek to know the secret that I am hiding from you," cried Juan.

"Your secret is one of sadness, and I must know it so that I may comfort you in your sorrow."

"Comfort me! Alas, that is impossible, Catalina."

"To love such as mine nothing is impossible!"

"Very well then; so be it. To-morrow I shall forfeit my honour and my life, for I shall be swept away by the river together with that structure which I have reared with so much mingled anxiety and hope."

"No, no!" cried Catalina, throwing her arms round her husband and stifling in her breast the grief which his words had caused her.

"Yes," said he; "at the moment when my confidence in my work was at its height, I discovered that an error in my calculations will assuredly cause the downfall of the bridge of San Martin, and of him who planned and built it."

"The bridge may be buried in the stream, but not you, my hus-

band, my love! I will go down on my knees to the noble Cardinal and beseech him to prevent your carrying out this horrible contract."

"You will but ask in vain, for, even should your prayer be granted, I will not live dishonoured."

"Then you shall preserve both life and honour," replied Catalina, firmly.

IV.

Day was about to break, and Catalina appeared to slumber, whilst her husband, worn out by grief and toil, had fallen into a deep heavy sleep which almost approached unconsciousness.

Catalina got up noiselessly, scarce daring to breathe, made her way to the kitchen, and climbed out through the window which looked on to the Tagus.

It was still dark, and a star here and there broke the gloom.

Towards the bed of the Tagus no sound was to be heard but the rushing of the river, and the moaning of the wind as it swept through the scaffolding of the bridge of San Martin.

Catalina, before making her exit through the window, had seized from the smouldering embers on the hearth a brand still burning, and noiselessly closing the window after her, she set out, holding her breath even, lest a sound should escape her.

Whither was she going? On what errand was she bound? Did she take the burning brand with her to light her on her way amidst the surrounding darkness? In spite of the obscurity around her and the dangers of the path, perilous even in the broad glare of day, along which she was hastening, Catalina was careful to conceal under her cloak the light which alone could show her the windings of the precipitous track she was traversing with a speed marvellous in one so delicately framed.

But after great risk and exertion she reached the bridge, through whose arches the wind still moaned, whilst the river foamed along with an angry roar as if enraged at not being able to overcome this new and apparently invincible obstacle to its course.

Catalina drew near to the buttress of the bridge, and could not repress a cry of horror. Perhaps it was that she found herself on the very brink of the boiling abyss! Or was it that in her hand, accustomed only to do good, she bore a means of destruction? Or it might have been the awful peal of thunder which just at that moment sounded in her ears; or did she think that they who do not understand a sacrifice for love, might hold that a crime had led her to where she stood?

Be that as it may, Catalina hesitated not, but drawing her torch from under her cloak, she set fire to the scaffolding of the bridge. The resinous pine-wood was speedily in a blaze, and the flames,

fanned by the wind, lapped the timbers with their fiery tongues and enveloped the bridge with fearful rapidity.

No need of torchlight now—and Catalina hastened back to her home, entering as noiselessly and with the same precautions as had marked her exit.

Her husband was sleeping still, and Catalina, hurriedly divesting herself of her clothes, lay down beside him, just as a tremendous crash announced that some of the huge blocks of stone in the bridge had given way.

A few moments later a dull continuous murmur was heard throughout the city, and from a hundred steeples clanged the dread alarm of fire, whilst the crash of the falling arches drew from the Toledans sounds of grief such as those which their fathers had uttered when Don Enrique set light to the structure which in those days had been their pride.

Juan de Arévalo awoke with a start. Catalina lay at his side, to all appearances asleep. Juan dressed in haste and hurried into the street, there to learn, to his unbounded joy, that the ill-fated bridge which he had built had fallen a prey to the flames, and was then in ruins.

Both the Archbishop and the Toledans attributed the fire to lightning, the thunder-storm during the night having rendered that explanation most probable: and however great their grief over the destruction of the bridge, they held their own regrets as trifles in comparison with the despair which they assumed would overwhelm the soul of the architect, when he learnt the full extent of the disaster which had converted into a heap of ruins the structure he had fondly hoped would be a triumph.

The Toledans never knew whether the destruction of the bridge was due to lightning or incendiarism, but Juan de Arévalo, who had lived a blameless life, and believed that the good are ever under God's protecting arm, did not hesitate a moment in attributing the conflagration to the fire of Heaven, and Catalina asserted that she was of the same opinion. Surely God would forgive the falsehood of a wife, who, with it, saved the life and honour of her husband.

The burning of the new bridge merely delayed the triumph of Juan de Arévalo for a year. When that time had elapsed, on the festival, too, of San Ildefonso, the Toledans crossed the river by the bridge of San Martin to visit their beloved Cigarrales. And the Archbishop, Don Pedro Tenorio, at the banquet given in honour of Juan de Arévalo, who was seated at his right hand, said to Catalina:

"If with most men it is true that 'the third time pays for all,' may it not be said in the case of your husband and our well-beloved friend, Juan de Arévalo, that 'second thoughts are best'?"

RHINE WINE IN RHINELAND.

BACK into Rhineland, back into the May-time,
Apple and cherry blossoming above;
Out of grey London, gloomy in mid-day time,
Into a land of laughter and of love.
Glad with the sense of sunshine and of summer,
Gaily last year we drank the Rhenish wine;
Singing our praises of the sweet new-comer,
May—'neath the walls of Eltville on the Rhine.

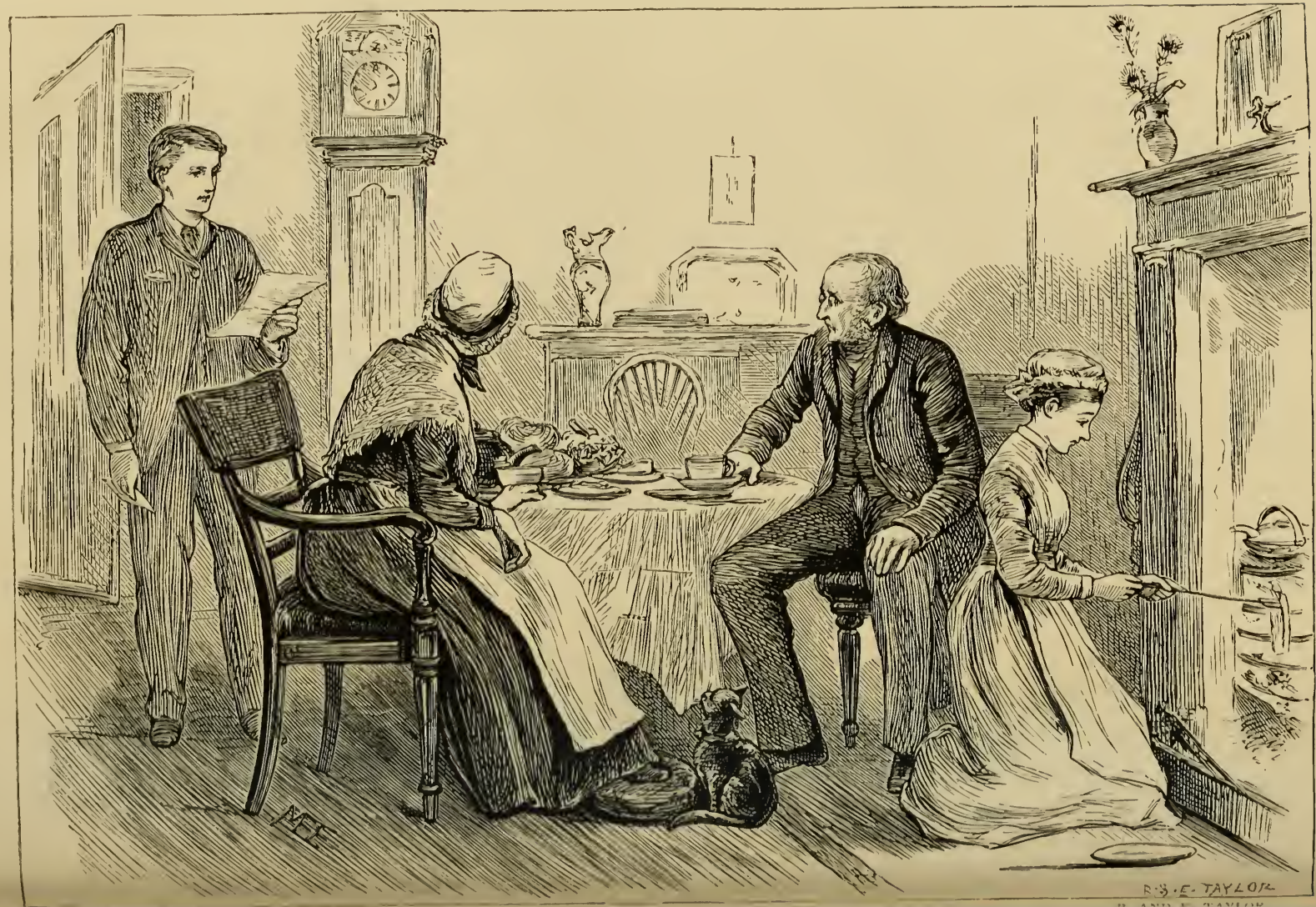
Sang we the songs and legends of the river
Swelling beneath us, jubilantly free,
Into the sunset flowing on for ever,
Bearing our jests and fancies to the sea.
Rang the old walls of Eltville to our laughter,
Shed the pink blossoms softly to our feet.
Ah! tho' Life's tears, like raindrops, follow after,
Spring, in the Rhineland, whispers "It is sweet!"

Summer crept on—the Sun God with full quiver
Smiting the hills to purple, green, and blue;
In the deep glades of Biebrich on the river
Scarcely the plane trees let the sunbeams through.
Mid garden-groves, where music loved to linger,
We in enchantment drank the Rhenish wine,
Until the moon rose, and with magic finger
Touched the broad bosom of the sleeping Rhine.

Ah, golden Dreams, September-crowned with glory!
As by steep paths we climbed the vineyard ways,
There was no peak, however grim and hoary,
But gave its fulness in those autumn days.
Merry at heart, we laboured morn and even,
Piled the deep vats, and wreathed the patient kine;
Till, when the white stars made the stream a heaven,
Restful we sat and drank the Rhenish wine.

Friends in the Fatherland, who gave us greeting,
Held out warm hands to strangers by the way:
Drink, in your Christmas feasts, to our next meeting;
Think of us sometimes when your hearts are gay.
God keep your homes from sighing and from sorrow,
Send you all blessings on your corn and wine;
That, while Time lasts, the wanderer may borrow
Sunshine and gladness from the German Rhine.

G. B. STUART.


R·S·E·TAYLOR

THE ARGOSY.

JUNE, 1880.

THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH OF APRIL.

THE twenty-fourth of April was here, and with it Gilbert Denison's seventieth birthday.

The long winter had come to an end at last. It was a lovely spring morning, fresh and sweet. The air was full of the melody of birds, faint delicious odours stole in and out among the garden paths, a warm sun shone over all. But we must for the moment leave Heron Dyke.

In the breakfast-room at Nunham Priors, a charming house among the Sussex Hills, sat Gilbert Denison—that Gilbert Denison who was cousin to the master of Heron Dyke, and between whom there had been such a long and bitter feud—and Frank, his only son.

Gilbert Denison of Nunham Priors bore little likeness to him of Heron Dyke. He was a lean, finical old gentleman, a little younger than his cousin, wearing a brown wig and a long, buttoned-up, bottle-green coat that reached nearly to his heels. His whimsical but good-natured face was full of lines and puckers and creases, and he had an odd quaint way of screwing up his lips while waiting for an answer to a question, that many a low comedian might have envied. Living much by himself, his establishment was a small one; his wife was dead, his son Frank chose to be often away from home, and the old man had no love of show or ostentation. He liked his gardens and hothouses to be well looked after, and everything around him to be cosey and comfortable, but beyond that he cared little. He kept one old-fashioned carriage in which he drove to and from the station on the occasions of his frequent journeys to town. An hour's ride by railway took him to Charing Cross, and after that it was but a short

walk to one or another of the great auction rooms where so large a portion of his leisure time was passed: for Mr. Denison was a great bibliophile and noted collector of curiosities. Nothing came amiss to him that was recommended by its rarity. From the skull of a Carib chief to an etching by Rembrandt, from an illuminated missal to a suppressed number of *La Lanterne*, or a bit of Roman pavement dug up in the City, his tastes were omnivorous enough for all. Nunham Priors itself was a very museum of curios. Some half-dozen or more of its rooms were entirely filled with a miscellaneous assortment of articles purchased by him from time to time at different auctions. Next to the acquisition of a bargain, Mr. Denison's greatest pleasure was in dusting his treasures and re-arranging them in different ways, or in displaying them and descanting on their rare qualities to some appreciative visitor.

"And what better way than this could I have found of investing my surplus income?" he would sometimes say to his son. "Nearly all you see I picked up as bargains, and in twenty years they will sell for a hundred per cent. more than I gave for them. No fear here of broken banks or shares at zero."

The breakfast this morning was the first meal father and son had partaken of together for some months. Mr. Frank had lingered unconscionably long away on his rovings, and the old gentleman was testy over it.

"I do wish, Frank, you would leave off gallivanting about the world," said he, as he cracked an egg. "It is high time you settled down. Why don't you marry?"

The words sent Frank into a laugh. There was not much likelihood of his marrying yet, he answered.

"It's no laughing matter, sir, I can tell you."

"Matrimony? No, I suppose not."

"Tush! you know what I mean," retorted the old gentleman. "You ought to be looking out for a wife. What do you suppose I was thinking the other day, Frank? that it might be a good thing if you and that young lady at Heron Dyke made a match of it. It would heal the family feud, and—and bring all the money on both sides into one bag."

Frank looked at his father in some surprise. "The young lady at Heron Dyke?" repeated he.

"Why, yes," said the old gentleman testily. "That half-cousin of yours, Miss Ella Winter."

"Did you ever see her, sir?" asked Frank.

"No: how should I? I might as well ask for a sight of the man in the moon."

"I confess that I should like to see Miss Winter," said Frank.

"Zounds! man, why don't you do so, then?"

Frank shook his head. "My respected kinsman would not like to catch me prowling about his preserves at Heron Dyke."

"The young men now-a-days are nothing better than a set of molly-coddles," grumbled Mr. Denison with a tinge of contempt. "When I was a young spark—but where's the use of talking?" he abruptly broke off; and Frank laughed again.

"Do you know what day this is, Frank?" presently resumed Mr. Denison.

"I am not likely to forget it, father. It is the twenty-fourth of April: and Squire Denison of Heron Dyke is now seventy years old."

"Yes—if he is alive," said Mr. Denison grimly.

The tone was significant, and Frank stared across the table at his father. "Have you any reason, sir, for thinking that he is not alive?"

"I have reason to know that he was given up months ago by his medical attendant, and that he has never once crossed his own threshold since last December. I have reason to know, moreover, that there is something very inexplicable going on inside the Hall: and, remembering what sort of man my cousin Gilbert is, I feel sure that he would stick at nothing to keep me and mine out of the estate."

Frank was silent for a moment or two. "How did you come by this information, father?"

"Oh, I put Charles Plackett on the matter a couple of years ago; not but that he knew for himself what a wily fellow my cousin Gilbert was; and Plackett has been following the scent ever since. He has employed an agent at Nullington, one Nixon, to keep his eyes open on Heron Dyke; and Nixon has done it, so far as outside vigilance goes, for he cannot get inside; and has sent up his reports to Charles Plackett from time to time. Perhaps you'd like to hear what he says?"

"Why yes, I should, very much indeed," replied Frank.

Charles Plackett—of the firm of Plackett, Plackett and Rex—was the family solicitor. Mr. Denison had the breakfast things taken away, and then produced a case of papers. "They date from a good while back," he observed; "but I will just read you two or three extracts from the past few months."

Frank rose and shut the door. And Mr. Denison, rubbing his spectacles, put them on, and began.

"October 14th. Dr. Jago was suddenly sent for by the Squire, vice Dr. Spreckley, superseded. As Dr. S. has been the Squire's medical attendant for twenty years there must be some very special reason for so sudden a change.

"October 22nd. Dr. Jago goes daily to the Hall. Have got an inkling at last of the reason of Dr. Spreckley's sudden dismissal. Dr. S. himself very cautious and reticent: does not say much about it to anybody. Dr. Jago, over his hot grog of an evening in the smoking-room of the Pied Bull, sometimes lets his tongue wag a bit. The man is naturally something of a braggart. From what I can make out, Dr. S. was incautious enough to tell the Squire that he could not live through the winter. Thereupon the other man was

sent for. He calls S. an old woman, and says openly that the Squire will live till next midsummer, if not longer. Something rather queer about that, seeing that Dr. S. has had twenty times the experience that he has had.

"October 29th. Mrs. Carlyon has been staying at the Hall for the last few days. She and Miss Winter left by rail yesterday morning with a lot of luggage. The servants report that they are going abroad for several months. This does not look as if the Squire felt himself to be in any immediate danger. If he did think so he would hardly let his niece leave him for so long. The neighbourhood, however, teems with silly reports—that the Hall is haunted by a ghost, and Miss Winter could not bear to stay in it during the dark days of winter.

"November 8th. Met the Squire to-day as he was being driven out in his brougham. Had not seen him for two months. Could not help noticing the change in him since that time—a great change. He looks woefully ill and haggard; not fit to be out of his bed.

"November 12th. Shalders the carpenter has been employed up at the Hall for the last few days. He told me all about it after a couple of glasses of toddy, in answer to my cautious questioning—not that he has been told to keep silence. He has been shutting in the Squire's rooms from the rest of the house with two baize-covered doors. No one can reach Mr. Denison now except through those doors. The doors in question can only be opened by a patent key, of which key Shalders has supplied four duplicates. Why should the Squire wish to isolate himself thus? Shalders is as much at a loss to guess the meaning of it as I am. They say at the Hall it is to ensure quiet to the Squire: but he could be ensured that without two protecting doors.

"November 28th. A piece of good fortune to-day. I tracked a young woman, a discharged housemaid from the Hall, to the railway station and had a long confab with her while she was waiting for a train. It seems that the Squire is really shut up behind the green baize doors—whether with or without his consent, who shall say?—and that only four persons are allowed to have access to him. They are Dr. Jago, Aaron Stone and his grandson Hubert, and a certain Mrs. Dexter, a middle-aged nurse from London, hired by Dr. Jago, of whose presence there I confess that I was previously unaware. The doors are always kept locked—no other inmate of the Hall ever sees or hears anything of the Squire, unless it be on those rare occasions when he drives out for an hour. Very mysterious, to say the least of it. The girl had got that rubbish into her head about the house being haunted, and would have liked to talk of nothing else—and she looked disposed to be offended because I laughed at it.

"December 19th. The Squire has only been outside the baize doors twice during the last month, and then only for half an hour's drive in the park.

"January 1st. The Squire has never been seen outside the house since.

"January 7th. Dr. Jago goes up to the Hall every morning. He told a friend of mine the other day that Mr. Denison was no worse than usual, and that he was only kept indoors by the cold winds.

"February 3rd. Nothing seen of the Squire since my last report, and yet we have had a fortnight of beautiful open weather for the time of year. Jago daily visits the Hall as usual. I've made acquaintance with one Hannah Tilney, the gardener's wife at the lodge. Creeping in there one fine morning, my hand to my side, I begged to be allowed to sit for five minutes, telling her a thumping story about a weak heart. She is a decent woman, but fond of gossip, as they all are, and she had a queer thing to talk of. She said that ever since early in December the shutters of Mr. Denison's sitting-room had been closed and barred at dusk, although it was a well-known fact that all his life the Squire hated to sit in a room of which the shutters were closed or the blinds pulled down. I do not see much in this myself: old people's fancies change: but the woman seemed to think it very strange, a matter for speculation, and said that she and her husband could not understand it at all. Speculation of what, you will ask, and in truth I can't say: but an air of mystery seems to overhang the doings in the Hall.

"March 1st. No news of the Squire. He is pretty well, it is said, but he has not been seen out of doors since the 17th of December. Nothing fresh at all to report, except that I have ascertained that every week there passes through Nullington Post Office a letter from abroad addressed to Mr. Denison in a lady's handwriting. Is this letter from Miss Winter? If so, can she be aware how matters are going on at Heron Dyke?

"April 8th. Nothing fresh. Jago daily at the Hall. The Squire still invisible to the outer world. No visitors have been admitted for a long while."

Mr. Denison, having come to the last extract he deemed it needful to read, shut up his case, and looked at his son.

"Like the agent Nixon, I must say that I do not see much in all this myself," observed Frank.

"Don't you!" retorted his father. "I do, then. To me it looks remarkably unaccountable. There is a mystery about it that I can't fathom, and Charles Plackett has my instructions to go down to Heron Dyke."

"What to do, sir?"

"To see my cousin Gilbert, and satisfy himself by ocular demonstration that he is still alive and—and mentally sane. You look surprised, Frank; let me tell you what perhaps you never knew before—that there is a clause in old Uncle Gilbert's will which empowers me to take the step in question."

"Is there! How curious that he should have made it."

"A great deal that he did was curious. But, for my part, I think some prevision was upon him that such a clause might be needed. I tell you, Frank," concluded the old gentleman, "that I am strangely curious myself, just now, as to what may be doing at Heron Dyke."

On this warm and sunny morning of the twenty-fourth of April, the bells of Nullington Parish Church rang forth a merry peal. They continued to do so at intervals throughout the day. The Vicar of Nullington, who had given the orders, was rejoiced to think that his old friend, Squire Denison, had lived to reach, what might be called, the crowning day of his life.

Throughout the length and breadth of Nullington the stagnation of every-day life seemed stirred by a ripple of excitement. People came to their doors to listen to the bells, groups in earnest conversation might be seen at the corner of almost every street, neighbour looked in upon neighbour, customers lingered longer than usual in the shops, bar-parlours held their knots of eager gossipers. Not an inhabitant of the little town but knew that this was the twenty-fourth of April, and that if the Master of Heron Dyke should live to hear the clocks strike noon, houses and land and all that pertained thereto would become his own irrevocable property, and the great battle of his life would end in his remaining the victor.

Mr. Denison was a man who had never laid himself out for personal popularity, and of late years he had been very little seen abroad. Still the neighbourhood felt that he was one of them. For forty years he had made his home at Heron Dyke, not spending half his time in London or in foreign countries, as so many other great people did, and they would have been sorry to see his place usurped by a strange branch of the family of whom nobody knew anything, except that the head of it was said to be a half-demented gentleman who had much more of the furniture broker about him than the county magnate. Should Squire Denison live through to-day, all he might die possessed of would go to his niece Miss Winter, a young lady beloved by all, rich and poor, and one quite worthy to be the Hall's mistress.

There was one inhabitant of Nullington, however, who did not feel quite so elated as the rest. He was too much puzzled for that. It was Dr. Spreckley. He stood at his window in the morning sun, listening to the cheery bells. Mr. Denison had lived to see his coveted birthday, and the bells were ringing for it; but Dr. Spreckley felt as if he were in a fog, and should never distinguish anything clearly in medical practice again. Knowing Mr. Denison's constitution so thoroughly, and the malady he had been long suffering from, he did not see how it was *possible* for him to be still alive.

Night and day of late had the good physician brooded over the

mystery. For to him it seemed a mystery; but a mystery beyond his comprehension. So far as his own skill and experience went, and that of eminent authorities in London to whom he wrote minutely of the case, it had seemed to him not only improbable but impossible that Gilbert Denison could have lasted to see Christmas. Yet here he was alive; and, as reported from Heron Dyke, fairly well, on the twenty-fourth of April!

Dr. Spreckley was yet at his window when his successful rival practitioner, Dr. Jago, came driving past in his gig, a high-stepping mare in the shafts, which he had recently bought. He was on his way to Heron Dyke, and he was going this morning half an hour earlier than usual. In honour of the occasion he had dressed himself in a new suit of black, with a white cravat and a fashionable overcoat. He glanced up at the window as he passed, and Dr. Spreckley felt sure that there was a smile of insolent triumph on his face which he now did not conceal. As Spreckley turned away, his heart was very bitter within him.

The Heron Dyke post-bag this morning bore a letter addressed to the Squire, dated from Florence. Ella Winter had written and posted it so that it should reach him on the twenty-fourth. After numerous congratulations and loving wishes came these words: "I cannot tell you how greatly I have longed to be at home for your birthday. But it was not to be. Now, however, that my six months' extradition are at an end, cannot you name a time for my return to Heron Dyke? We have been slowly making our way homeward, as you are aware, lingering here and lingering there, and continually hoping to receive a summons that we were wanted back in the old nest at home. But even my aunt has grown tired at last of these perpetual journeyings from place to place, and at the present moment would, I verily believe, gladly exchange all the churches and picture galleries of Florence for the dear delights of an afternoon's shopping in Regent Street; and, to her house in Bayswater we are returning. Do then, my dear uncle, in your next letter, name the day when you will expect to see me once again under the old roof-tree; and be assured that neither wind nor weather will keep me from your side an hour beyond it."

An answer to this letter was sent from Heron Dyke the following day, which reached Miss Winter in due course.

It has been said that Mr. Denison's letters to Ella were written for him by Hubert Stone from Mr. Denison's dictation, but each of them bore at the foot the Squire's own peculiar and crabbed signature, which anyone would have found it difficult even passably to imitate, and the present letter was no exception to this rule. In it occurred these passages: "I begin to be as anxious to see your young face again as you are to be back at home. But, as I have said all along —patience, patience. Enjoy yourself while you can, and, now that you *are* abroad, see all that you can. Strive to enrich your mind in

every possible way, and to lay up stores of pleasant memories for days to come. You will not soon get away again from the sound of the sea when once you are back, I promise you. I am as well and hearty as I was two years ago, so that you need not be troubled on the score of my health. That Jago is a wonderful fellow. A fortnight with your aunt at Bayswater would be a pleasant finish to your travels; it would please Mrs. Carlyon to have you with her for a time, and we must not be ungracious to her, lassie. Let us put it, then, that I shall look to see my pretty one back at Heron Dyke on the first of June, not to part again for a long, long time."

Hubert Stone had also donned a new suit of gentlemanly attire this morning, and even old Aaron wore his best clothes and a particularly well-starched cravat. The Squire's long-wished for birthday must be observed appropriately. The maids were gladdened by new gowns and muslin aprons trimmed with ribbons, Dorothy Stone by a cap of rich old lace. Dorothy, however, did not seem to find much pleasure in the day; she sat by the fire in her room, complaining of neuralgia, with a frightened expression of face and a dazed look in her eyes.

The grand old entrance doors were flung open to-day. A cheerful fire burnt in the hall, where no fire had been known to burn for years. A Turkey carpet covered the middle of the floor, on which stood a carved table of black oak; on the table was an antique silver salver for the reception of callers' cards. Tubs containing orange trees and shrubs from the conservatory stood in each corner of the hall.

Nothing, however, could put Aaron into a good temper when he chose to be in a bad one. He wandered about like a restless ghost, peering into this place and that, scolding the maids, grumbling at his nephew, and eyeing Dr. Jago askance as though he were some malign wizard.

Shortly after noon the carriage of the first caller drove up—that of the Vicar, the Reverend Francis Kettle. His daughter would have been with him, but that she was from home. He was received in the hall by Dr. Jago and Hubert Stone. A few words passed, and then Mr. Kettle expressed his strong desire to see once more, once more to shake by the hand, his dear old friend the Squire. Dr. Jago was blandly sorry, but refused. The fact was, he said, that the Squire had passed a very restless and uneasy night, having hardly slept at all. An hour ago he had fallen into a refreshing sleep, which it was to be hoped would last for several hours and be of great benefit to him. Still, if the Vicar pressed it, Mr. Denison should be awakened, and ——

"Not for worlds," interrupted the Vicar, hastily. "I would not have him awakened on any account. You will not fail to offer him my congratulations, and to say how greatly I hope to see him. Perhaps another day he may be able to receive a short visit from an old friend."

"No doubt he will be," returned Dr. Jago, quite warmly. "He had been saving himself up for to-day, you must understand, sir, intending to see just one or two esteemed friends; and—and now this wretched past night has marred it."

Other carriages drove up in quick succession after the Vicar's departure, till nearly every person of consideration in the neighbourhood had either called or left cards. To all inquiries the same reply was given: Mr. Denison had hoped to receive a friend or two to-day, but he had passed a restless and uneasy night, and had lately fallen into a deep and refreshing sleep which it would be undesirable to disturb.

One caller, especially full of regret at not being able to see the Squire, was Lady Maria Skeffington. Maria Kettle was her god-daughter and had been named after her. She was a withered-up maiden of sixty-five. Lady Maria gazed round the entrance hall with a sigh, and recalled the time when she had felt so sure that she should one day be mistress of Heron Dyke. Some forty years previously Mr. Denison had danced with her several times at the county balls and had paid her other little attentions when they met; and she, following the fashion of young maidens, had taken it for granted that he meant to ask her to be his wife. But the longed-for declaration never came, and hope gradually died out of her heart. Still, as Lady Maria often told herself, she had never been so near matrimony before or after, and she yet cherished a half-tender recollection of the handsome young Squire. They had remained good friends: and to-day, a white-haired old woman, Lady Maria felt an intense longing in her heart to see him once again before he should go hence. When told that it might not be, she dropped her veil, and went back to her carriage, crying softly to herself.

About five o'clock, a message reached the Hall from Mr. Toomes, the leader of the Nullington string band. Mr. Toomes wished to know whether the band might be permitted to pay their respects to the Squire on his birthday, by playing a few select pieces at the Hall during the evening.

Old Aaron took the message into the Squire's room with an ill grace; he would have liked to refuse had he dared: and he came back in a few minutes with the Squire's gracious answer—he would be very much pleased to receive the band at half-past eight.

The band came at the appointed hour: two violins, a violoncello, a harp, and a couple of clarionets, the musicians being all small tradesmen of the town. They were met at the postern which opened into the private garden by Hubert Stone, who now wore a fashionable overcoat and was smoking a cigar. Hubert marshalled the players on to the sward directly opposite to, but a few yards away from, the windows of Mr. Denison's sitting-room. The Squire was but weak, he said, and it was desirable not to have the sounds too near. John Tilney, the gardener, and his wife crept in behind the musicians,

and stood a little in the background. Had Mr. Hubert Stone noticed the movement, he might have ordered them away, for he had a great notion of keeping servants in their places.

The shutters of Mr. Denison's sitting-room had not been closed this evening. A bright wood fire was burning on the hearth, and two lighted wax candles stood on a table in the middle of the room. The tall gaunt figure of the Squire as he sat in his great leathern chair, muffled up in his long dressing-robe, was plainly visible to the group on the lawn. His head looked partially shrunken between his shoulders as he sat leaning forward a little, staring intently into the fire, his bony hands clasped over the knob of the massive cane which for a long time past he had made use of to help him from room to room. The firelight flickered on the diamonds in his ring, it made the hollows of his wasted cheeks seem deeper still, and brought into prominent relief the contrast between his black velvet skull-cap and the long white locks which straggled from under it. He sat there, the solitary living figure in a picture that otherwise was instinct with gloom, and that was not wanting in a sort of weird solemnity of its own.

At a signal from their leader the band struck up the old English air, "Welcome to thy Native Vale." As the first note struck his ear, the Squire lifted his head quickly, changed the position of his stick, and put on the air of a man who listens intently.

The first piece at an end, there ensued a minute's pause, and then the band struck up again. This in turn was followed by two other pieces. When the last strains of the fourth air had died away the Squire was seen to rise slowly and painfully to his feet. With the help of his cane, and drawing the folds of his dressing-gown around him, he tottered feebly forward till he came near the window. Standing there, and changing his cane to the left hand, he gravely bent his head to the (to him) invisible onlookers in the garden, and waved his right hand two or three times in token of thanks and greeting. Turning then, he tottered back to his chair.

Three hearty cheers were raised for the old Squire; and the musicians filed out of the private garden, Hubert locking the door of it. A plentiful meal was set out for them in the smaller servants' hall, to which they did not fail to do ample justice.

Old Aaron, grumpy as usual, did not choose to preside at it; though his grandson had told him in the hearing of the household, earlier in the evening, that it was what he ought to do. Barely did he condescend to show himself at all, for this visit of the musicians had not met with his approval. He came stalking through the room while they were at supper, looking at them in his surly way and muttering to himself about "ruin," and "extravagance," and "dying in the workhouse." But the ale was strong, and the company did not mind. They knew old Aaron before, and they burst into a laugh as he shut the door behind him.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. CHARLES PLACKETT CALLS UPON THE SQUIRE.

By the afternoon post on the twenty-fifth of April, a letter was delivered at Heron Dyke for Mr. Denison. It was written by the firm of Plackett, Plackett and Rex; and it informed the Squire in courteous terms—that is, in as courteous terms as lawyers can bring themselves to use—that, in accordance with the wishes of their esteemed client, Mr. Denison of Nunham Priors, Mr. Charles Plackett would present himself at the Hall at eleven o'clock on the morning of the twenty-sixth instant, with the view to satisfying himself (as a mere matter of form) that the Master of Heron Dyke had lived over his seventieth birthday. If it were not convenient to Mr. Denison of Heron Dyke to give a personal interview to Mr. Plackett at that hour, he would be good enough to name a later hour in the same day. The letter said nothing of that clause in the will of the late Gilbert Denison which gave the younger cousin power to command such an interview, for of that clause Squire Denison must, himself, be perfectly aware.

Whether this letter put out the Squire, or not, did not appear; but it very considerably put out Aaron Stone. Aaron had not recovered his temper of the day before; the congratulatory visits to his master had annoyed him, more especially that one crowning visit of the musicians in the evening. The intimation of this additional visit from the London lawyer pretty nearly wound-up Aaron.

Hubert, who opened all letters in the Squire's room, came forth presently, letter in hand, leaving Dr. Jago behind him. That astute physician, while never omitting his daily visit to Heron Dyke, made it at uncertain hours, earlier or later, according to his own convenience. Old Aaron and his wife were seated at tea in their parlour; one of the maids, Eliza, having been called in to make a fresh piece of toast. She knelt before the fire with the small toasting-fork.

"The Squire says you may read this," said Hubert, entering, and putting the letter in his grandfather's hands. "The people must be received of course."

Aaron shuffled on his spectacles, and went to the window for the better light, holding the letter close to the panes. When he had mastered the contents, he burst into a perfect storm of fury. Mrs. Stone started in her chair; Eliza looked round; Hubert only laughed.

"A set of spies and sneaks!" he called out, bringing down his hand upon the table with such emphasis that the cups and saucers rattled. "They shall never set their prying feet inside this house; I'll bar the door first, I can tell 'em that. Lawyers, indeed! No, no."

"Now, grandfather, why do you go on at this foolish rate?" remonstrated Hubert. "The lawyers will not damage you. Anyway, the Squire means to see them—he has no choice."

"*No choice!*" spluttered Aaron.

"No, none. And if you'll go to his room presently, maybe he will tell you why. Why should he not see them—if he is well enough?" added Hubert.

"Maybe you are an idiot," growled old Aaron.

Hubert laughed again; these violent outbreaks of temper afforded him only amusement. Aaron sat down, his hands trembling, to finish his tea. Eliza had the slice of toast on the table then, and was buttering it.

"Look here, grandfather," said Hubert. "The Squire chooses to admit this lawyer from London, and you cannot set up your will against his, but if you have so great an objection to the visit, why not be away while it takes place. For this week past you have been talking of going into Nullington to buy some hay and clover; go in to-morrow morning and buy it then."

Aaron, who had a great notion of keeping his grandson in order, stared wrathfully at this. "And who is going to listen to the advice of a young jackanapes like you?" he demanded—which caused Eliza, still buttering the toast, to hide a laugh. "The world's coming to a pretty pass, young man, when such as you must command your elders and betters!"

"Nay, I don't seek to command; you'd not let me if I did," returned Hubert. "And if I advise, it is only for the general tranquillity. The Squire intends to receive these lawyers—I daresay there will be two of them—and it won't do for you to make a disturbance when they come. You seem to forget how weak and ill the master is; how often Jago has told you that freedom from worry is his best chance. Therefore I say, go off to Nullington after breakfast, grandfather, and let the visit take place in your absence."

Aaron growled for a minute or two. "It's a shame!" he burst forth again; "a cruel shame. Here's all the work of the previous birthday got over, and now this bother springs up! Hasn't the master got to be kept quiet, I'd ask you? Who can answer for it that this interview with a pack of rascally lawyers won't—won't——"

"Injure him, you were about to say," put in Hubert quickly at the sudden stoppage. "Well, we can guard against that. Jago must of course be present to take care of his pulse.—You go off in the morning to Nullington, and leave the house to peace and quietness," concluded Hubert, as he took up the letter, and turned to quit the room.

"Be you not going to sit down and have your tea, Hubert dear?" called out the old lady, who had not dared to interrupt before.

"Tea? Oh, I shall take that by-and-by."

In one of the passages, on his way to the Squire's rooms, Hubert

met Jago. "What are you laughing at?" asked the Doctor, noting the more than smile on the young man's lips.

"At old granddad. You never saw him in such a tantrum. Left to himself, he'd be for pitching water on the head of this lawyer when he comes to the door; ay, and upon my word I'm not sure but he would do it. Finely he went on; to the edification of one of the house wenches. I advise him to betake himself to Nullington in the morning, to buy his corn and clover."

Dr. Jago made no particular reply. "This lawyer, who is coming," said he—"is he well acquainted with the Squire?"

"I believe they met once or twice a few years ago," replied Hubert.

Apparently Aaron saw the expediency of taking his grandson's advice: for in the morning he made himself ready for the visit to Nullington. Hubert chanced to pass through the kitchen when the old man was having his gaiters buttoned by Phemie, Eliza standing by.

"I wonder you did not take the dog-cart, sir," said Hubert.

"What do I want with the dog-cart?" contended the old man in an irate tone. "Do you think I've not got strength enough left in me to walk into Nullington?—There, there, girl, that will do," he added, giving a stamp or two to his umbrella, as Phemie came to the last button.

"As you please," said Hubert, who never allowed himself to be put out of temper by the old man. "And if you chance to call at the saddler's, tell him I find the new stirrups a great success."

His umbrella in one hand, his thick walking-stick in the other, Aaron set out. Hubert put on his hat and walked with him through the shrubbery at the back of the house. The clocks were striking ten. The clouds were gathering, as if for rain.

At eleven o'clock Charles Plackett and his managing clerk, Mr. Foxey, drove up to Heron Dyke and stopped at the main entrance. They were admitted by one of the housemaids and found Hubert Stone waiting to receive them. Mr. Charles Plackett was a short rubicund man of fifty-five, with a quick eye, a ready smile, and a chirruping voice. He had far more the look of a gentleman-farmer than of a busy London lawyer. Young Mr. Foxey was a placid-faced individual in spectacles and a suit of unimpeachable black.

"Mr. Charles Plackett, I believe?" said Hubert as he came forward.

"Yes, I am Charles Plackett; and this is my managing clerk, Mr. Foxey. I have the pleasure of speaking to——?"

"My name is Hubert Stone. I am Mr. Denison's secretary and have the general control of all his business affairs."

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Stone. I presume you are aware of the purport of my visit; the cause which brings me here?"

"I am perfectly aware of it," replied Hubert. "Mr. Denison has no secrets from me."

"I suppose there is no objection to my seeing Mr. Denison at once?"

"None whatever. He is quite ready to receive you. But, before going to his room, it would be as well if you exchanged a few words with his medical attendant, who is waiting to see you."

"As you please about that," responded Charles Plackett. "My interview with Mr. Denison need not necessarily last more than a very few minutes."

Chairs were placed for the visitors in the large drawing-room, and they sat down. Hubert touched a hand-bell, and Dr. Jago entered. As Hubert introduced him, he drew up a chair by the side of the lawyer.

"I am sorry to say that my patient is in a very low way this morning," began the Doctor. "I must therefore press most earnestly upon you the necessity of making your visit as brief a one as possible."

"I have already remarked that I shall only require to see Mr. Denison for a few minutes," replied Mr. Plackett stiffly. There was something about this little black-bearded foreign-looking doctor which impressed him unfavourably.

"You will pardon me for intimating that I only speak in the interests of my patient," responded Jago in his blandest accents. "Anything that excites Mr. Denison is a source of danger to him in his present condition. He is and has been for some time now so very weak, that his lasting so long has somewhat surprised his friends; and he is so very——"

"Very much surprised them indeed, I fancy," interrupted the lawyer: and Dr. Jago took a glance at him with his keen eyes.

"And so very fractious, I was about to add," went on the Doctor, with a smile. "We have something to do with him at times."

Mr. Charles Plackett rose. "If Squire Denison is ready to receive us, sir, it seems to me that the sooner we get the interview over, the better."

"I am quite of your opinion, sir," returned the Doctor, his tones as bland as the lawyer's were curt. "Mr. Denison is quite ready and waiting. I believe you have met Mr. Denison before," added Dr. Jago, as they were quitting the room.

"We have met twice," responded Mr. Charles Plackett. "It was in London, about five or six years ago."

"So long ago as that!" exclaimed Hubert Stone. "Dear me! You will find him greatly altered, sir."

"I expect that. But I should know him, however much he may be changed," pursued the lawyer. "Is Mr. Denison able to sit up?"

"Some days he is—but never so early as this. You will have to see him in bed."

The Squire's bed-room was next to his sitting-room. As they

passed through the green baize doors, both thrown wide open to-day, Charles Plackett noticed them.

"These look new," remarked he. "Put up to keep out the draughts?"

"Not so much that as to keep out noise," remarked Dr. Jago.

"One would think you had not much noise at the Hall here."

"Pardon me. Visitors are pretty frequent, and it annoys the Squire to hear them when he cannot receive them. His ears are quick."

Dr. Jago halted at the bed-room door as he spoke. "Wait just an instant," he whispered; "I'll go in and see that he has not dropped asleep."

So they waited outside, the two visitors and Hubert. "It is quite right," said Dr. Jago, reappearing. "He is awake and ready to see you."

Opening wide the door he stepped back; Mr. Plackett and his clerk following. Hubert went in last and closed the door gently.

The weather this morning was heavy and overcast—very different from the bright morning of the twenty-fourth—and what light might otherwise have found its way into the room was still further toned down by the heavy curtains which festooned the two windows and by the blinds which were drawn only half-way up. Still there was ample light to see the heavy, old-fashioned, four-post bedstead, and the haggard-faced man that lay upon it, supported by some half-dozen pillows. His grey duffel dressing-robe was thrown loosely over his shoulders, his black velvet skull cap was on his head, and his long grey locks, as they straggled from under it, looked as if they needed some woman's hand to comb them gently out. His cane lay on the coverlet within reach, so as to enable him to strike a small gong with it, which stood close by, when he wanted to summon his nurse from the next room. Finally, his cat's-eye ring gleamed on the second finger of his left hand as it had gleamed there for forty years. In the grate a small fire was burning, while on a table close to the bed stood bottles containing medicines and cordials of various kinds.

Mr. Charles Plackett walked up to the foot of the bed, and took a long steady gaze at the sick man.—"Good morning, Mr. Denison," he said. "I suppose you know the object that has brought me here to-day?"

"Aye, I know—I know," said the Squire wearily, in a low voice that had lost something of its harsh strident tones, and had acquired instead the hollowness that comes with protracted illness. "And now that you have seen me, much good may the sight do you!" he added, with a touch of his old grim irony. "Not that I intend any discourtesy to you, sir, so much as to them that have sent you."

Mr. Plackett was not usually at a loss for words, but he evidently felt the awkwardness of his position this morning. He coughed

softly behind his hand, and looked round at Dr. Jago, who responded by drawing up a couple of chairs and motioning the visitors into them.

"I had the pleasure of meeting you once or twice in London some years ago, Mr. Denison," spoke the lawyer, by way of a lame beginning.

"It may have been a pleasure to you, though I doubt it," retorted the Squire. "I can't say that it was much of a pleasure to me, knowing whom you represented. Come, now."

Mr. Plackett gave vent to a dry little chuckle. It was a way he had in business when anything particularly disagreeable had been said to him. "Well, well, it is perhaps the wisest plan to let bygones be bygones," he said, "though, if I remember rightly, you had the better of me at those interviews.—Your cousin, Mr. Denison, of Nunham Priors——"

"Titly-tutly, man alive!" broke in the Squire. "If you came here to talk to me about that viper—I say that viper, d'ye hear?—the sooner you pack yourself off the better.—You have seen me, and you have talked with me—what more do you want?"

The sick man, with his white face and gleaming eyes, looked so fierce, and his tone was one of such extreme exasperation, that Mr. Foxey involuntarily pushed back his chair in momentary alarm.

"Believe me, Squire, I had no intention of starting a topic that would be in the slightest degree offensive to you," said Mr. Plackett, in his most conciliatory tone.

The sick man turned away impatiently, and pointed to a cup on the table that contained beef tea.—Jago stepped forward and put the cup into his fingers. He lifted it to his lips, tasted a little of the tea, and next moment dashed the cup and its contents violently into the grate. "Cold—cold!" he cried with savage energy. "You are all alike," staring at Jago. "You are all in a league to hurry me into the churchyard!" And with that he sank back exhausted on his pillows, and began to catch his breath in quick gasps.

Mr. Foxey was so startled that his spectacles fell to the ground. Charles Plackett rose and pushed back his chair: he, too, was alarmed. Jago, taken aback like the rest, as might be seen from his countenance, motioned the visitors from the room. "Indeed, indeed, I won't answer for the consequences if you stay," he earnestly whispered. Hubert Stone was holding the door open.

"Cross-grained as ever," muttered the lawyer as he went out.

Hubert reconducted them to the drawing-room, and ordered in biscuits and sherry, which Eliza brought. Presently Dr. Jago joined them.

"He is coming round again," said the Doctor. "All his life, as I hear, Squire Denison has been subject to these little gusts of temper: but——"

"Little, you call them!" put in Mr. Plackett, sipping his wine.

The Doctor smiled faintly. "They are what we are most afraid of, I was about to say; and they are fearfully exhausting to him in his present condition."

"Rather an uncomfortable kind of man to live with," said Mr. Plackett, with a shrug.

"He certainly is a little trying at times," assented Hubert, with an emphatic nod. "But then, we are used to him."

"I suppose the Squire's niece, Miss Winter, looks carefully after his comforts?" observed the lawyer.

"Miss Winter is on the Continent: she has not been at home since last October," answered Hubert, with a brighter sparkle in his dark eyes.

"Indeed!" returned Mr. Plackett, in as surprised a tone as though it were news to him. "Rather strange, is it not, that Miss Winter should stay away from him—in his present precarious condition?"

"The Squire appeared to be well when Miss Winter left England; and —and he will not have her recalled. I believe she is expected shortly."

"One would have thought she would like to be near him."

"I daresay she would," interposed Dr. Jago; "but we think—*I* think—she is just as well away. It is so very essential to keep him free from excitement. We have a most excellent nurse—and he has every possible care and attention. That I can assure you."

"Oh, I don't doubt that," returned the lawyer, as he put down his glass, and rose to depart with his clerk. The Doctor wished them good morning there; Hubert Stone attended them to the outer door, and saw them drive away.

"There's something about that Dr. Jago which I don't like," remarked Mr. Plackett to his companion as they bowled along through the park. "I've been used to studying character for a number of years, and that fellow seems to me to be double-faced. Did you notice what a dark, sinister smile he had?—nothing English or open about it." And Mr. Foxey assented, for he had not at all relished the events of the visit.

"Fine property this, and no mistake," continued the lawyer, glancing from side to side as he drove along rapidly. "I was in hopes that *our* Mr. Denison would have succeeded to it. A good thing that he is a philosopher: he won't mind it much."

"With our client's income, I think that even I could afford to be a philosopher," said the clerk, drily.

"Aye, but there's an old proverb: 'Much would have more.' However, our side has lost the day, and it's no use crying over spilt milk. I cannot understand how it is that Miss Winter can be away at a time like this," he went on after a pause. "In fact, coupling what I've seen and heard to-day with that fellow Nixon's reports, I may go so far as to observe that there's something about the whole business which puzzles me and which I don't half like."

"But you have nothing tangible on which to ground your suspicions, have you, sir?"

"No, that's the dickens of it!" acknowledged Mr. Charles Plackett. "It is something tangible that I want. At present I am fighting with shadows."

Aaron Stone appeared to have recovered his temper in Nullington, for when he got back in the course of the afternoon, he was in quite a blithe humour. Marching straight into the large kitchen, with his stick and umbrella, he called the two maids about him to unbutton his gaiters, and both stooped down to the task.

"I saw them scoundrels o' lawyers, a-driving through the town in their gig," he cried; though he rarely condescended to address the girls, unless it was to scold. "Two of 'em sat in it. Nice rascals they looked—and a fine pace they went at!"

Encouraged by this affability, Phemie responded in kind. Telling him that the Squire had gone into such a passion while talking to the lawyers, as to dash his beef-tea into the grate, cup and all—Hubert having mentioned this little episode to the gardener in the hearing of the servants. And the news so tickled old Aaron that he chuckled for half an hour.

"I'd ha' done it myself; I'd ha' done it myself," he reiterated. "The Squire has got some proper spirit left in him yet."

CHAPTER XVIII.

SUDDEN TIDINGS.

Mrs. Carlyon and Miss Winter reached Paris on their way home, on the 18th of May. There was no especial need for them to hurry. They had received a letter from Mr. Denison—written as usual by Hubert Stone, but signed with the Squire's inimitable autograph—a few days previously, in which the 1st of June was named as the date when Ella would be looked for at Heron Dyke, and it was further intimated that the Squire would like to see Mrs. Carlyon at the same time. Under these circumstances, Mrs. Carlyon decided that a week could not be more pleasantly spent than in Paris, after which they could still afford two or three days in London before going down to Norfolk.

On the morning of the 20th the ladies went out shopping, and when they got back to their hotel, Ella found a telegram awaiting her. It was from Hubert Stone:—

"I deeply regret to inform you that Mr. Denison died very suddenly last evening, about midnight. Please telegraph back any arrangements you may wish to have carried out: also say when you may be expected at the Hall."

To Ella the shock was sudden and terrible. Having lost both

father and mother when she was very young, all the affection of her heart which would have been theirs, had they lived, was lavished on her uncle. It was as though she had been orphaned at one blow. Her anguish was made more bitter by the fact of her not having been with her uncle at the last. Why had he sent her away when he was so ill? Why had he so persistently refused to allow her to return earlier? And now she should never see him more!

Mrs. Carlyon took all needful travelling and business arrangements on herself, and left Ella to nurse her grief undisturbed. They found themselves in London within twenty-four hours of the receipt of the telegram. Here they were compelled to stay all night, and after ordering their mourning they started next day for Norfolk—leaving Higson behind, who had latterly been far from well. "A little rest will do her good," said Mrs. Carlyon. The close carriage, attended by Hubert Stone, met them at the station on their arrival, and they were at once driven to the Hall.

A short while given to her natural grief and emotion, and Ella summoned Aaron Stone to her presence in one of the smaller sitting-rooms. The blinds were down, the room looked dark and dreary.

Aaron came in, creeping and trembling, his head down. He was a crusty man, but faithful, and his master had been very dear to him. Ella felt for his grief. She advanced a few steps impulsively, and took one of his rugged hands into her soft palms.

"Oh, Aaron, old friend—you were his friend, and you are my friend—if you could have sent me word!" she sobbed. "If I could but have seen him once more before he was lost to me for ever!"

"There was no time to do anything—there wasn't really, Miss Ella," whispered the old man, his gnarled features working convulsively. "Nobody knew, nobody thought, what was going to happen, all suddenly, in the night."

"Sit down, Aaron," drawing a chair near her, "and tell me all that there is to be told. Oh! for one look from his kind eyes!—for one word from those lips that will never speak to me again!"

It was an easy-chair she had given to Aaron; he sat in it, gazing at the fire, his chin resting on his hand. The weather was very chilly still, though June was near; and the large old Hall never seemed hot in the sultry days of summer.

"It seems to me very strange, Aaron," began Ella, for the old man did not attempt to speak, "that there should be no signs observable, no apparent intimations that Uncle Gilbert was so near his end. What has the Doctor—Jago—to say about it?"

"I never saw a man more dumbfounded than Dr. Jago was," replied Aaron. "Says he, looking down at the poor Squire, 'I made sure that he would last for months yet'—maybe, you see, Miss Ella, he thought his treatment had put a new lease of life into him."

"What *was* the treatment?"

The old man glanced suspiciously up for a moment, and then

dropped his eyes again. "As if I could tell what it was in particular, Miss Ella! I'm no doctor. Jago can tell—if he will. It seemed to do the master good; to put a deal of strength into him."

"Did Dr. Jago come daily?"

"That he did. No medical man could be more attentive than he has been. He never once missed a day, week-days or Sundays."

"Then he saw him the day he died."

"Ay. He was here that day at midday, ma'am; and the Squire died at midnight in the evening."

"And he saw no change in my uncle that day; no symptoms of danger?"

"None at all; none. I met him as he came out of the room that very morning. 'And how do we find ourselves to-day, Doctor?' says I. 'Pretty much as usual,' says he. 'If anything, a bit brighter and more lively. He's doing very nicely, indeed, only you must not encourage him to talk too much; mind that. He is just as fond of a bit of gossip as ever he was.' With that, Dr. Jago bids me good-morning, and goes off, whistling softly to himself. No, no," muttered the old man, "he saw no signs of danger."

"And what does Dr. Jago say was the immediate cause of death?" sighed Ella.

"It's a long queer word he made use of," said Aaron. "Par—something."

"Paralysis?" suggested Ella.

"It means that, I take it. Paralysis of the heart, Miss Ella. Hubert said syncope—but he is not a doctor. There was no suffering; none. He went off as quietly as one sinks to sleep."

"I can't help wishing that my uncle had never sent for Dr. Jago," mused Ella. "I had far more confidence in Dr. Spreckley, who had studied his constitution for years."

"The Squire used to say," cried Aaron, "that he should never have been alive so long, if it hadn't been for Dr. Jago."

"It may be so. Who now can tell? But I was deeply grieved when Dr. Spreckley ceased to attend him. I thought — some instinct seemed to warn me—that it might not be for the best."

Aaron made no reply, and they sat a little while in silence. Then Ella spoke—in a softer tone.

"Did Uncle Gilbert often talk about me, Aaron? Did I seem to be much in his thoughts?"

"I don't think a day ever passed but what he mentioned you, Miss Ella," warmly replied the old man. "When he used to sit in his easy-chair, staring hard into the fire, I've said to myself many a time, 'He's thinking of one that is far away.'"

"Oh! that he had but sent for me!—How was it, Aaron, that he did not let me come home in time for his birthday? Could not *you* have suggested to him that I ought to be here?"

The old man coughed uneasily. "I did speak to him about it,

Miss Ella. I told him that you would be fretting your heart out at being so long away. But there! you know the kind of man he was—taking his own will and listening to nobody."

"It has seemed to me at times as though—as though you were all in a conspiracy to keep me away," returned Ella, dreamily. "I have said so to Mrs. Carlyon."

"All who?" asked Aaron.

"You—and Dr. Jago—and your nephew," replied Ella, fearlessly. "I was sent away by my uncle for the winter—for the dark days. They have long been over, yet still I was not allowed to return. Aaron, I cannot understand it."

"Maybe he wanted to grow still better before you saw him," cried the old man, shuffling in his chair. "He was always headstrong; you know that, Miss Ella; he wouldn't be driven by living creature. If one tried to make him turn one way, he'd turn the other. No chance, Miss Ella, if he didn't want you to come home, that we could make him send for you."

"Was he conscious when he died?—who talked with him last?"

"I did," answered the old man promptly. "He had been as cheerful as could be all day; less mopy than usual. At six o'clock he said he'd go to bed, feeling tired; and did go. At nine o'clock I took in his beef-tea, and stood by while he drank it; after that, I made up the fire. Then he talked with me for ten minutes or so about one thing and another. He hoped we were going to have a fine hot summer: hot weather always suited him best. Then he said that his lassie—meaning you, Miss Ella—would be on her way home by this time, and how glad he should be to see your bonnie face again. Next he said that he had been thinking of having the garden done up, and should get some pretty furniture from London put in your rooms, and that he would have more company at the Hall, and try to make the old place a bit more cheerful for you."

"As if I was not always the happiest when he and I were by ourselves!" said Ella, hardly able to speak for her tears.

"Then I gave him a glass of port wine," resumed Aaron—"you won't have forgotten that he liked a glass the last thing at bedtime—and he took it up to the last. After that, I lighted the one wax candle that he always kept burning all night. He would have the candle put so that as he laid in bed he could see the likeness of that beautiful young lady, which has hung over his bedroom chimney-piece as long as I can remember: who she was, he never told me. Then he held out his hand to me, as he always did at night of late—except maybe at any odd time when he was a bit put out. 'Good-night, old friend,' he said, 'I shan't want anything more till morning.' They were the last words that anyone heard him speak."

Ella turned and buried her face in the padded arm-chair.

"I had just got out of the room, and was shutting the door behind me," continued Aaron, "when I thought I heard a queer sort of

noise. I couldn't make out whether it was a groan or a cry, or what it was. However, I went back into the room. The Squire seemed lying just as I had left him, but he didn't speak. Not feeling satisfied, I took up the candle and looked at his face. There I saw something that made my heart quake as it had never quaked before. I called Hubert; and five minutes later his horse was in the dog-cart, and he was off to fetch the Doctor. It wasn't long before Dr. Jago was here, but the moment he clapped eyes on the Squire he saw there was no hope. My poor dear master couldn't speak, but we seemed to see in his eyes that he knew us. By-and-by he appeared to go to sleep. We could only watch by his bedside: and he died just as the clocks were striking twelve."

"Oh! my dear one—my dear one!" wailed the weeping girl.

"There was one queer thing, Miss Ella, that happened that same night," resumed the old man in a lowered voice. "We got to bed between two and three o'clock. I was the last to leave the room, locking the door behind me. I was the first person to enter the room in the morning: and—what do you think I found there?"

Ella looked at him in silence.

"I found the picture of that beautiful young lady lying face downwards upon the hearth. The nail that had held it for so many years had given way in the night, and there it lay. I have not hung it up again. You, Miss Ella, can do as you like about that. What I say to myself at odd times is this—Why should it fall down the very night the master died?"

Ella Winter felt that she could hear no more just now, and rose from her seat. "I want to see him, Aaron; I will go now. You go on first and bring me word whether anyone is in the room."

"You want to see him!" repeated Aaron, faintly and timidly, as a strangely troubled look took possession of his eyes.

"Yes, of course I do. I will go in now. If my sad eyes could not look upon his face living, they——"

"Oh! my dear Miss Ella," interrupted the old man, "no one's eyes will ever rest on his face again."

Ella stared at him. "What do you mean?" she asked in a voice that was hardly more than a whisper.

"Oh! cannot you guess? They brought his last coffin yesterday, and—and—I needn't tell you the rest."

"No—no—it cannot be!" cried Ella. "He died on Monday night, and this is only Thursday. By whose orders was this cruel thing done?"

"By Dr. Jago's orders."

"What right had Dr. Jago——"

"He said it was better so: he said it must be so. Indeed, it was obliged to be."

Ella sank back on a sofa, and hid her face behind her hands. It seemed to her that she was baffled at all points. And Aaron took

the opportunity to steal noiselessly from the room, as if he had been doing something wrong in it, muttering as he went.

"Now Heaven forgive me for a deceitful villain!"

The funeral was fixed for the following Monday: Hubert Stone making all the arrangements under the directions of Mrs. Carlyon, who wished to spare Ella as much as possible. Mrs. Carlyon was greatly taken with Hubert, of whom she had not seen much on her previous visits to Heron Dyke. "What an extremely handsome young man he is," she remarked to herself more than once. "So gentlemanly, too, in manners and appearance. Who would ever take him to be the grandson of a servant?"

Hubert's manner towards Mrs. Carlyon was full of deference, which was far from being disagreeable to that lady. But what in Hubert was put down to respectful sympathy might, in the case of a more commonplace and less good-looking man, have been looked upon as an impertinence from one in his position. Clever woman of the world though Mrs. Carlyon was, she had not the slightest suspicion of the flame that was scorching the heart of Hubert Stone and making his days and nights at once a delight and a torment to him.

One of Ella's first enquiries on reaching the Hall was, by whose wish and for what purpose the green baize doors had been put up which shut in her uncle's rooms from the rest of the house. It was to Hubert the question was put. All he could tell her was that the doors had been put up by the Squire's own express desire; merely to satisfy some whim he had taken on the score of being kept quiet. Ella, who knew how odd and whimsical her uncle had been in many ways, accepted the explanation.

Was it due to an oversight, or because the circumstance was not deemed worth mentioning, that Miss Winter and her aunt were not made aware of the presence of any nurse in the house during the last few months of Mr. Denison's illness? The name of Nurse Dexter was certainly never mentioned to them, nor was Ella yet aware of the existence of any such person. Within a dozen hours of the Squire's demise, Mrs. Dexter had packed up her trunks and was gone. She could be of no further use at the Hall, she remarked to one of the maids as she tied on her neat black bonnet, and, as her services were urgently wanted elsewhere, she thought that the sooner she got away the better.

Monday morning came. At nine o'clock Ella went to her uncle's room, and stayed there for an hour, alone with all that was left on earth of one whom she had so dearly loved. After that she went to her own room and was seen no more by anyone but her aunt till after the last sad rites were over. Maria Kettle was still from home. She was the one friend whom Ella missed in her affliction.

Mr. Daventry, the family lawyer, arrived early at the Hall. With

him he brought the Squire's last will and testament. Sir Peter Dockwray and Colonel Townson, the executors, together with a few other old personal friends of Mr. Denison whom it is needless to specify by name, arrived later on. The procession was joined in the park by some thirty or forty carriages belonging to the gentry of the neighbourhood, a few, but only a few, of which were empty. Dr. Jago, as a matter of course, was there, in a brougham hired for the occasion. A special invitation had been sent to Dr. Spreckley, whom Ella could not help regarding in the light of a wronged man. He was touched by a proof of regard so unexpected, but his pride would not let him accept it. He watched the procession from behind the lace curtains of a friend's window with feelings that were half regretful and half bitter.

The service was read by the Vicar, the Rev. Francis Kettle. In the church, and afterwards round the grave, in addition to those who had followed the body, was assembled a crowd of quite two hundred people. "He's gone at last, poor old man," was the general comment of these outsiders, "but he lived long enough to get the better of those who would have robbed him of his property."

Everyone there knew the stake for which he had played, and everyone was glad that he had won it.

And so to their last resting-place, with all due honour and respect were committed the mortal remains of Gilbert Denison, late master of Heron Dyke.

Ella would fain have foregone the, to her, painful ordeal of having to listen to the reading of her uncle's will after the return from the funeral, but Mrs. Carlyon and Mr. Daventry both told her that she ought to be present. And so the company assembled in the great drawing-room, with a few of the upper servants.

"We are short of one person," remarked Mr. Daventry, as he glanced round the room.

"Whom may that be?" asked Sir Peter Dockwray.

"Dr. Spreckley. We will give him five minutes' grace. If he is not here then, we must proceed without him."

No one could have been more surprised than Dr. Spreckley was when, upon returning home, after watching the funeral, a note was put into his hands, requesting his presence at Heron Dyke to attend the reading of Mr. Denison's will. What could his presence be wanted for, he asked himself again and again. He had refused to attend the funeral, yet now he was asked to attend the reading of the will! He could not make it out at all: but he went.

"Here comes the straggler," said Mr. Daventry, as Dr. Spreckley was ushered into the room.

Ella rose and shook hands with him warmly, and Hubert placed a chair for him. Then Mr. Daventry settled his spectacles on his nose and spread open the will.

The will itself was dated some three years previously, but had been added to and altered by various codicils afterwards.

The last codicil was dated November 10th of the previous year, and was witnessed by Mr. Daventry's clerk, and by Phemie Hargrave, at that time housemaid at the Hall. A brief summary of the various items comprised in the will and its codicils is all that need be given here.

To his kinswoman, Gertrude Carlyon, as a token of affection and esteem, and in recognition of her kindness to his niece, Ella Winter, the testator bequeathed the sum of two thousand guineas.

To his old friend and medical attendant, Dr. Spreckley, as a token of sincere liking and esteem, was bequeathed the sum of five hundred guineas. This legacy was included in a codicil which bore date after Dr. Spreckley had ceased to be the Squire's medical attendant.

To his old, tried, and faithful servant, Aaron Stone, the testator bequeathed an immediate legacy of two hundred guineas, together with an annuity of two hundred pounds per annum for life, the annuity to be continued to his wife for her life should Aaron die first.

To Hubert Stone, for services faithfully rendered, was bequeathed the sum of seven hundred guineas. In this case the sum originally named in the will was three hundred guineas, but had been increased to seven hundred in the last codicil.

To John Tilney, the gardener, the sum of one hundred guineas.

To Edward Conroy, "a young fellow whom I like, I can't tell why," the sum of one hundred guineas. A smaller legacy to the coachman, and to one or two others of the dependants, completed this part of the will.

Ella started at the name of Conroy; in spite of herself her cheeks flushed rosy red. She turned her face away to hide its colour.

"I don't know this young fellow," observed Mr. Daventry, alluding to Conroy. "Neither himself nor his address."

The reading was soon over. Everything, save what was taken up by these legacies, was bequeathed to Ella Winter—houses, lands, money, all unconditionally—in a few brief loving terms which set the girl's tears flowing afresh. In the last lines of the will was expressed a wish of the testator—it was not made an absolute condition—that in case of his niece, Ella Winter, ever getting married, her husband should change his name to Denison—in order, as it was expressed, that "the old name might not be forgotten in the land."

Mr. Daventry folded up the will and took off his spectacles. The visitors began to disperse, some partaking of refreshment, which was laid out in another room, some declining it; and at length the old house and its inmates were left to themselves, Mr. Daventry alone remaining. General matters of business had to be spoken of; the afternoon waned, and Ella asked him to dine with them.

The old lawyer accepted the offer, but left as soon as the meal was over. It had been served in a cosy panelled room, not far from the entrance-hall. It was a more cheerful room than many of the larger ones, and Ella and Mrs. Carlyon had sat mostly in it these few days since their return.

They sat together now, in the pleasant May twilight, talking in undertones of many things past and to come. By-and-by one of the housemaids brought in candles, and Mrs. Carlyon, who was a great reader, went in search of a certain book which she knew to be somewhere in her bedroom, without being exactly sure where. Some last faint traces of twilight still lingered in the sky, and she went up without a light.

Crossing the entrance-hall, Mrs. Carlyon ascended the great staircase, and traversed the gallery until she reached the corridor into which the door of her room opened. In searching for the book she threw down a tray from her dressing-table, containing sundry small articles; and she wished she had brought a light as she stooped to feel for them and pick them up. It was accomplished at last, and the book was found; but all this had taken some little time, and the dusk had deepened in the corridors and the gallery as Mrs. Carlyon went out. In fact, coming from the light afforded by the windows of her room, they looked quite dark.

"Let me see—this is the way, I think," said Mrs. Carlyon to herself, hesitating as to the turning she ought to take in the gallery; and finally she took the wrong one.

Three or four minutes later she rushed into the sitting-room with a white face and startled eyes, and sank into a chair, thoroughly overcome.

Ella rose up in alarm. "Good gracious, aunt," she cried, "what is the matter? Has anything happened?"

"Oh, child, I—I—I think I must be very foolish—but I have just had a terrible fright."

And the fright was upon her still, to judge by the trembling voice and hands.

"But what has frightened you?" asked Ella.

"That's the strangest part of it; that I don't know what—or who," spoke Mrs. Carlyon, after a pause and an effort to collect herself. "I went up for my book, you know, Ella, and I was rather long finding it; and when I got into the corridors and gallery again it was dark, and I missed my way, I suppose. At all events, instead of coming to the staircase as I expected, I presently found myself in a part of the house quite strange to me—at least, it seemed so in the dusk ——"

"Was it the north wing?" involuntarily interrupted Ella.

"I don't know; it may have been. Seeing a window, through which a little dim light came in, I halted at it to consider what was to be done, and how I should best find my way down. While

thus standing, a something black—I cannot tell you what it was—brushed swiftly and silently past me and disappeared in the deeper darkness beyond."

"Something black!" repeated Ella, feeling an awe she could scarcely account for.

"Ay. The figure—it was human, I conclude, but whether male or female I can scarcely tell, though I think the latter, because the skirts of the garment it wore touched my gown in passing—the figure, I say, just showed itself to me, and was gone."

"Did you hear no footsteps, Aunt Gertrude?"

"None whatever. I was so startled that, for a few moments, I could not stir or think. Then I rushed along the corridors, haphazard, and came straight upon a staircase. Instinct comes to our aid in these moments of perplexity, more often than we think," broke off Mrs. Carlyon.

"Aunt, it must have been one of the servant girls," spoke Ella, finding relief in the idea.

"No, no, no," emphatically pronounced Mrs. Carlyon. "Not so, child. I ran down this staircase, not knowing or caring whither it might lead me," she continued, "and along the passage at its foot, and found myself close to the large kitchen. Aaron sat smoking his pipe over the fire; within the open door of another room I saw the two maids seated at work by candlelight, old Dorothy inspecting its progress through her spectacles. How I managed not to run into them with my fear, I can hardly tell; but I controlled it, and came on to you. Now you know all, Ella."

Miss Winter felt both puzzled and annoyed. She knew not what to think. Had it been a servant who told the story she would have said at once that the girl had been the victim of her own foolish fancies; but in the case of a woman like Mrs. Carlyon no such belief was possible. Who and what could it have been? Had it anything to do with the strange disappearance of Katherine Keen?—and with the superstitious reports that arose afterwards?

"This had better not be spoken of, aunt," said Ella.

"No, indeed," quickly assented Mrs. Carlyon. "But you won't find me going up stairs alone at dusk again. All the wealth of the Indies would not tempt me to live through a winter in this dreadful old house."

(To be continued.)

"THAT CHARMING COUNT."

I.

"SO good!" said Mrs. Damer.

"So ugly!" said her niece.

"So clever!" continued the elder lady.

"So fat!" replied the younger one.

"The kindest-hearted young man in the world."

"And the least interesting."

"Well, have it your own way!" exclaimed Mrs. Damer, now fairly irritated. "For the sake of argument, I will grant the justice of all you say. I will go further, and concede that the vast majority of the world is as blind as yourself to true worth and real talent. I will even admit, if you like, that I am an unreasonable old woman. But, however ugly, fat and uninteresting Arthur Lestrange may be, even *you*, Dora, cannot deny that he is well-born, well-bred, and rich."

"I do not deny it, my darling aunt," said Dora. "All I say is that his birth, breeding and wealth constitute no sufficient reason for my marrying him."

"With your industry, your aversion to gaiety, your indifference to dress and your passion for housekeeping, you reserve yourself for love in a cottage, I presume?" asked her aunt sarcastically.

Dora laughed—a soft, saucy laugh. She rose from her occupation of painting a spray of yellow roses, and approached the open French window where Mrs. Damer sat at work. Kneeling, she pillowed her wilful, golden head on the old lady's shoulders, asking, with a world of surprised reproach in her brown eyes: "Why *will* you be so cross?"

"Child! I am not cross," said her aunt, softly stroking the girl's little hand. "I am not cross, but I am an old woman now, and not a rich one. I would fain see you in some safe and tender keeping before I close my eyes on a world which is full of trouble and of temptation."

"But you are not going to close your eyes yet," murmured Dora, caressingly. "And Arthur Lestrange is not the only young man in the world, or even in Farnleigh."

"But he is the only one in whose affection for you I could fully trust," said Mrs. Damer. "He has proved that he loves you sincerely, but he is not likely to expose himself to a series of repulses. He will certainly accept as final the answer which you are about to despatch him to-day. In all probability, he only risked a second proposal because he thought—poor fellow!—that his recent success might have led you to regard him more kindly."

"A trumpery little comedy!" said Dora, with a pout.

"A comedy which wiser people than Miss Dora Morton have admired and applauded," said her aunt severely. "A month ago, you would have had more sympathy with such triumphs. I am afraid that I can guess only too well the source of your contempt for them now."

Dora Morton rose with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"You allude to Count Starolyi, aunt?" she said in rather an agitated voice. "I am glad you give me thus the opportunity of making you a communication from which I have shrunk all the morning, because I feared to give you pain. Count Starolyi ——"

"Has proposed to you?" hastily interposed Mrs. Damer.

Dora nodded, looking a little anxious and yet defiant.

"And you have accepted him?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Damer threw up her eyes, slightly shrugged her shoulders and resumed her work. For a few moments silence reigned.

"Won't you wish me joy, auntie?" asked Dora in a somewhat rueful tone.

"I hope you will be happy, dear, of course," replied the old lady quietly. "It is not a marriage which, in any case, I could have desired for you. But as in a few months you will be twenty-one, and your own mistress, I have but one favour to ask of you."

"And what is that?" asked Dora, somewhat disconcerted at not meeting with the opposition for which she had prepared herself.

"To wait, before making your engagement public, till I have news of Count Starolyi's position and circumstances, from Buda-Pesth. Foreseeing that the impression which he had plainly made on you might deepen into love, I wrote to the Consul for information, and in a few days I ought to have an answer. Until then, will you consent not to consider your engagement a settled thing?" Mrs. Damer, as she concluded, held out her hand affectionately to her niece.

"Dear auntie," said the girl warmly, "I will wait, of course. To do you this pleasure costs me little, for I know that the Consul will be able to report nothing but what is good of Max."

"I hope you may be right," answered Mrs. Damer, and changed the conversation.

Farnleigh, on the outskirts of which, in a charming cottage, Mrs. Damer and her niece lived, was a pretty town on the western coast of England. A few straw hat manufactures supplied its wealth, and half-a-dozen or more semi-aristocratic families supplied its pretensions. These families dined one another; criticized one another; assisted at one another's christenings, marriages and funerals, and made common cause against any intruder who endeavoured to gain entrance within their sacred circle. They were a trifle narrow-minded, but had never suspected it; and a little dull, but nobody had ever told them so. They were, in consequence, altogether self-satisfied and estimable.

The great excitements of the young ladies (numerous and very pretty) consisted of balls at the county-town in winter, and of lawn-tennis parties in the summer. To these the officers of the garrison in the afore-named county-town, were invited regularly, and occasionally came; and the possibility of their coming constituted the great charm of the entertainment.

Such being the state of things, it is not difficult to imagine the pleasurable sensation recently caused by the arrival on the scene of a fascinating Hungarian Count. This gentleman had been introduced by one of the élite—the Honourable Mr. Stracey, who had known his father, and who, on meeting him in Paris the previous winter, had given him a pressing invitation to visit Farnleigh. Mr. Stracey, good-natured, impulsive and not very wise, had forgotten his invitation almost as soon as he had given it, and was rather surprised one fine summer morning to receive a letter from the Count announcing his imminent arrival. Nevertheless, being hospitable, he welcomed his guest in a manner worthy of their mutual pretensions to the bluest blood, and introduced him to all his acquaintances ten miles round. There had consequently been a perfect epidemic of dinner-parties, musical-parties, lawn-tennis parties, at which the Count had won golden opinions from all sorts of people. His only detractors were the officers, who felt a little sore at being condemned all at once to play second fiddle to the seductive compatriot of Kossuth.

Count Starolyi had especially a great success with the ladies. He spoke several languages; wrote French verses; caricatured to perfection; and sang to the guitar. He had a beautiful, drooping moustache, melancholy eyes, patriotic sentiments, and decorations from every court in Europe. Such a combination of charms and accomplishments had never been seen in Farnleigh before. In a week half the pretty girls were convinced individually that the Count was in love with *them;* while the other half had to conceal to the best of their ability the tragic discovery that they were in love with *him.*

One peculiarity of this delightful stranger was a passion for making presents. He scattered gifts with the munificence of an Eastern potentate, and his lavishness was only equalled by his impartiality. Everybody whose hospitality he had enjoyed could exhibit some picture, or jardinière, or jewel which testified to the fascinating foreigner's gratitude and taste: all these simple, unpretending souls found themselves suddenly the objects of an undreamt-of prodigality. Delicate silver paper parcels, baskets of exotic flowers, and ruby velvet cases appeared upon their breakfast-tables with Count Max Starolyi's coroneted cards and "respectful homages."

At first people thought that they ought *really* not to accept. One or two efforts were made to express these doubts to the generous nobleman. But they evidently caused in him such a mournful perplexity; they were so clearly both inexplicable and painful to him, that it was felt to be impossible to proceed. Public opinion gradually

pronounced itself in favour of keeping the presents. "What would be very odd in an Englishman was only natural in a foreigner," people said. Hungarians, too, were known to have habits of the utmost splendour. The example of Prince Esterhazy was quoted by somebody who remembered to have seen him. This settled the matter. Consciences were thenceforth at peace, and Starolyi moved in the midst of adoration and applause.

Meanwhile his attentions to Dora Morton, the acknowledged belle of Farnleigh, became extremely marked. Amid no little heart-burning, the conviction gained ground that this young lady must soon be asked to adorn the brilliant society of Vienna. She herself was probably not much astonished at her impending good fortune, but she was exceedingly gratified at it. In the first flush of a triumph so intoxicating, it was hardly to be wondered at if she thought but lightly of her aunt's objections, and troubled herself still less about the feelings of Arthur Lestrange.

A word as to him, and then the reader will be put completely au courant of events as they stood at the opening of this story.

The young man in question was usually considered a very fortunate person. It is true he had but a few hundreds a-year of his own; but, on the other hand, he was the acknowledged heir of his uncle, who had twice as many thousands. This uncle, Sir Edward Lestrange, was the county magnate. He and Lady Lestrange adored their nephew, and had always encouraged him in idleness, so as to have him as much with them as possible. Fortunately for himself, Arthur Lestrange had very good brains; and though he had chosen no profession, he cultivated literature for his own amusement. This kept him employed, and saved him from utterly wasting his youth while he waited for the rent-roll that was one day to be his. Lately, indeed, he had shown signs of wooing the Muses with more seriousness of purpose than anybody had deemed likely; and, in a recent dramatic production, he had achieved a quite unusual measure of success. Immediately on this, he had come down to Farnleigh, and, for the second time within a year, had laid his name and his prospects at Dora Morton's feet. The result is already known. Not only did he meet with a fresh repulse, but the general voice, in coupling Miss Morton's name with that of the "charming Count," convinced him of the uselessness of further pursuit.

Mortified and sad, he would probably have returned directly to London, but for an indisposition of his aunt, which, although apparently not serious, was sufficiently unaccountable to give rise to some alarm.

Three or four days passed. Arthur Lestrange had had time, if not to recover from, at any rate to succeed in concealing, the first bitterness of his disappointment. Mrs. Damer was still in expectation of her answer from the Consul. Dora was still hugging the thought of her imminent delight in announcing her engagement to all her friends.

"You talk of days, but it appears to me that I am waiting ages to own you—my treasure," murmured Starolyi to her one evening when, at a dance at the Straceys', the lovers sat apart in the friendly privacy of the conservatory.

"Dear Max," said the girl, ardently, "I also feel that I should belong to you more entirely if I could proclaim to all the world that I am yours. But my promise to my aunt binds me to secresy for a few days more."

"Why?" whispered Starolyi, discontentedly. He had not a particularly musical voice, and, perhaps because of this, always spoke in a very low tone to women. "Why?"

Dora blushed, hesitated, picked a flower in her bouquet to pieces, and finally said, frankly: "I do not see why I should not tell you, for you are too kind and too just to mistake my aunt's motives."

The Hungarian raised his eyebrows at this exordium, and looked a little uneasy.

"Well!" said Dora, plunging desperately into her subject, "the truth is, my aunt is a little mistrustful of Mr. Stracey's enthusiasm; and though she likes you very much"—(Oh! Dora, was this *quite* the case?)—"she cannot be satisfied as to your prospects, and so on, until she has had a little more information about them."

"But I am willing to give all the information which she desires," said Starolyi, with an air of great dignity. "My private papers, my cheque-book, the letters from my agents, the plans of my property—all are at her service."

"Of course, of course, I know," stammered Dora, already repentant and overawed.

"She has but to speak—to *ask*," continued the gentleman, in a still more injured tone. "This English prudence is, I confess, a little strange to me; in Hungary we manage things differently: aspersions are not cast upon the honour of a nobleman. But here, where I am a stranger——"

"Dearest! please say no more!" broke in Dora, now thoroughly distressed. "I was wrong to tell you. I have hurt your feelings."

"*You* can never hurt my feelings," was the tender reply. "What pains me is that your aunt should not have spoken to me. Has she, then, been cross-questioning Stracey?"

"No—o—not Stracey," said Dora, in agony.

"Whom then?" questioned her lover, in so sharp and angry a tone that she looked up at him quite startled. His face did not reassure her; he was livid, and his eyes sparkled with just indignation.

"What have I done?" cried the girl, clasping her hands in a positive panic.

"Speak! can't you?" said Starolyi, roughly.

Then, as she rose suddenly to her feet, a little affronted now as well as frightened, he hastily took her hand, and, in a softened tone, said, "Pardon me, my darling! I have alarmed you, without mean-

ing it. But all these delays and scruples are intolerable to a nature like mine. And when one loves—as I love—one fears a shadow." He had also risen, and now, putting his arm round Dora's slender waist, he drew her gently to him, while he said in his most loving whisper: "To lose you would be intolerable. Tell me, then, just to appease my vain fears—to whom did Madame Damer write?"

"To the English Consul at Pesth," said Dora, nestling to his side, and glancing up at him now with laughing eyes. She had expected to see him look relieved, to smile, and, perhaps, to forget all annoyance in the tempting vicinity of her pretty head. But to her surprise, and to her fresh alarm, a muttered execration escaped him, and his arm tightened round her like a vice. She positively gasped with the pain of the pressure, and cried "Max!" in a faint voice of suffering and fear. He released her then at once, said coldly, "Another time I shall know what treatment to expect from an English lady," bowed and marched out of the conservatory. The next moment he was waltzing with Clarice Ferrers—a piquante little brunette, and Dora's particular rival.

Amazed, and rather angry herself now, Dora also left the conservatory and sat down in the nearest vacant chair. She was too incapable of a doubt as regarded her lover to attach much importance to the agitation which he had just displayed. She supposed that also was "foreign"—like Esterhazy's diamonds. Her predominant preoccupation consequently was to appear indifferent to his desertion. She fanned herself and secretly hoped that somebody very nice would immediately invite her to dance.

A momentary diversion in the current of her thoughts was suddenly caused by the entrance of Arthur Lestrange. They had not met since the day when she had rejected his hand; and if she had remembered him in the interval it had been to imagine him in a condition of sentimental despair. She experienced, consequently, a slight shock of disappointment on seeing him walk in perfectly cool and collected, with no outward signs of disappointment. Although not exactly handsome, he was intelligent-looking, self-possessed and agreeable, and had the mellowest, most sympathetic voice in the world.

On perceiving Dora, he moved towards her, leisurely threading his way among the dancers and dexterously dodging the whirling trains of the ladies. He stopped to shake hands with several people on the way, and, on reaching his cruel fair one at last, addressed her gently but quite calmly.

Considerably nettled, Dora could think of nothing more brilliant or more gracious to say than: "Still here! Mr. Lestrange. I thought you had returned to London."

"I go to-morrow, Miss Morton. I have nothing to keep me here now that my aunt has set all our minds at rest." Lestrange as he spoke had an odd little smile which would have puzzled his companion had her head not been so full of her own affairs.

"You are very late," remarked Dora next, thinking while she spoke that it would be better to dance with him than with nobody.

"I have only looked in for a moment because Mrs. Stracey made me promise to do so. There is Stracey himself. I must go and— Who is that?" exclaimed Lestrange, breaking off in his speech, and staring at a couple in front of him with all his might.

"*That?* You are somewhat vague," said Dora.

"Of course I don't mean Miss Ferrers. I know her quite well. I allude to the man with her."

"That is Count Starolyi."

"*By Jove!*" ejaculated Lestrange with the utmost earnestness. And in a tremendous hurry he left Dora, and, seeking out his host, retired with him to a corner and subjected him to a series of rapid, low-toned questions. Miss Morton, to the last degree irritated and astonished, began to think that everybody was going a little mad. Meanwhile the minutes passed and Starolyi returned not to his allegiance. The aggrieved beauty was at last thankful to accept as a partner a small, red-faced officer, who stuttered at all times, and now, agitated by his unexpected success, became completely unintelligible.

Arthur meanwhile had finished his conversation with Mr. Stracey, and, with a thoughtful air, approached Mrs. Damer. She received him with the most cordial kindness, and, like her niece, remarked on the unexpectedness of his presence.

"I was afraid you had left Farnleigh," she said.

"As I have already told Miss Morton, I go to-morrow. And I had intended not to return for three or four months; but I shall probably come back in as many days," was his answer.

"Not on account of your aunt, I hope?"

"My aunt is all right. I was much astonished to learn just now that the gentleman with whom Miss Ferrers has been dancing is Count Starolyi."

"Had you not seen him before?" asked Mrs. Damer, in surprise.

"Strange to say, I had not, though I had heard of him often enough."

"I should think you had!" exclaimed the old lady, viciously. "I used to think the Athenians very unreasonable for ostracising Aristides; but if they were half as sick of his virtues as I am of Count Starolyi's charms I wonder they did not tie him up in a sack and *drown* him."

The energy of her manner made Lestrange smile. He was but human, though a very fine fellow; and nobody minds hearing a successful rival abused. "The Hungarian appears to be no favourite of yours. May I ask why?"

"I mistrust him," said Mrs. Damer, emphatically and confidentially.

"I admire your penetration. I mistrust him also, but *pour cause*," answered Arthur.

"You do!" exclaimed Mrs. Damer, excitedly. "Tell me your reasons, I beseech you. I have, alas, a personal motive for asking."

"I can guess it," said Lestrange in lowered tones and turning a little pale. "I would like to know, if you can conscientiously tell me, how matters stand with this man and—and your niece. I ask with no thought of myself."

"I am sure of that," replied Mrs. Damer, feelingly. "Still, it pains me to have to tell you that my wilful Dora has engaged herself to him. She is only waiting to make the engagement public until I have heard from the Consul at Pesth, to whom I wrote for information as to Starolyi's real position. If you could tell me anything—*anything* that would serve as a pretext for refusing my consent to the marriage, I would gladly avail myself of it. I believe the child's vanity is more touched than her heart. At any rate, I hope so."

Lestrange was silent, and Mrs. Damer glancing furtively, saw that the effort it cost him to master his strong emotion for the moment precluded all possibilty of speech. The answering pang in her own heart filled her eyes with tears; and for a few moments she also found nothing more to say.

"Whatever the answer to your letter may be," remarked Lestrange, at last, "I feel no doubt in my own mind that our friend here is not all that he represents himself. At present, I am not at liberty to say more, for I have no actual proof. But in a few days I shall return to Farnleigh, armed with information. In the meanwhile, my dear Mrs. Damer," he wound up in quick, energetic tones, "I beseech you not to trust your niece out of your sight."

"Humph!" answered Mrs. Damer, with melancholy humour. "Considering the agility and caprices of my niece, the task you impose upon me, my friend, is neither materially nor morally easy. But I will do my best."

"And so will I," said the young man rising. "And therewith—good-night!"

II.

"I CANNOT—no, I cannot! Do not ask me, Max! Think of my poor aunt! She has always been so good to me. Would you have me break her heart?"

Thus, sobbing and imploring, spoke Dora to her lover about a week after the events recounted in the preceding chapter.

"I understand. You do not love me. You share Mrs. Damer's insulting suspicions. You also wait for the answer from this Consul," said Starolyi, disdainfully, and releasing his hands from the clinging grasp of the weeping girl.

"I *do* love you. I believe every word you say to me. An angel from Heaven could not convince me that you were less than tender and true," cried Dora, in despair at his accusations. "But I cannot

elope with you. Indeed—indeed—it is impossible. My aunt is old; at this moment she is ill. The shock might kill her."

"Bah! as if anyone ever died of a cold! Madame Damer, on learning that you were gone, would lose her appetite for breakfast, and recover it for dinner; and, by the time you returned to her, would be ready to welcome the Countess Starolyi with open arms."

"But why cannot you wait?" urged Dora, wavering, but not yet fairly convinced.

"I have told you. I am summoned back by the Emperor." And Starolyi produced a grand official-looking document, which his companion could not read, it being in Hungarian. "War may break out at any moment. I *must* return to the command of my troop. Would you have me not respond on the moment to my country's call?"

"Oh, no, no!" said Dora, much afflicted, hiding her head upon his shoulder.

Starolyi pressed her to his magnanimous heart, while he continued: "I may be wounded, even killed." (Dora shuddered.) "You can have but small comprehension of love if you do not feel, without the need of words from me, what joy I should have in calling you mine ere we part, and in knowing that, if I fall, I shall at least have left you mistress of my ancestral home, and owner of my name."

To be a widow at all is very sad; to be a soldier's widow, while equally sad, is interesting; but to be both a soldier's widow and a Countess, is a poetical form of desolation that was not likely to happen to many young ladies at Farnleigh. To do our warm-hearted and affectionate, if foolish, Dora justice, she clung to her lover with the feeling that to lose him would be a very crown of sorrow. At the same time, the romantic charm of the picture which he conjured up made it more difficult than ever for the inexperienced and impulsive girl to resist his entreaties.

Starolyi had announced that morning that he must leave on the spot for Vienna. At the same time, he had sent Dora to her aunt's room (Mrs. Damer was laid up with a most inopportune cold!) to ask permission for an immediate marriage by special licence. As may be imagined, Mrs. Damer had promptly and absolutely refused. Through her confidential maid she sent a telegram to Arthur Lestrange, putting him in possession of the facts as they stood, and urging him to speed in his researches. A prey to anxiety, she listened for every bell that might bring her news, and fretted cruelly at her own enforced inaction. The only thought which gave her any comfort was that of the impending arrival of her married niece, Mrs. Corbett. This lady lived about thirty miles from Farnleigh, and Mrs. Damer, when forced to keep her room, had written begging her to come and watch over Dora. Diana Corbett had answered that her children were only just recovering from the measles, and she was about to accompany them into sea-side lodgings. She would only

wait to settle them there, she added, and then take instant flight to Farnleigh. There she hoped to be on Wednesday—the next day to that on which we find Starolyi urging a wedding by special licence.

It is useless to repeat all the arguments, alternately angry and impassioned, which the Hungarian used to overcome Dora's resistance. Suffice to say that he eventually extorted from her a promise to join him in London on the following night. It was his own intention to leave Farnleigh immediately, and he undertook to make all the necessary arrangements for the marriage to be celebrated "at the Austrian Embassy" on Thursday morning. The night of Wednesday Dora was to pass at the house of Starolyi's greatest friends—a Baron and Baroness attached to the Corps Diplomatique. Dora, bewildered by his fluency and awed by the general spendour of his projects, when she had once given her promise, had not the courage to withdraw it. Nevertheless, the tears she shed on bidding adieu to him, when he went to pack his trunks and take leave of the Straceys, had their source far less in any emotion connected with him than in genuine remorse and terror. The thought of abandoning her aunt in sickness positively wrung the girl's heart. She passed a miserable night, and when her sister arrived next day, went forward to greet her with eyes so heavy and cheeks so wan, that Mrs. Corbett gave a cry of consternation.

"Good heavens! child," said the bonny, bright woman, taking her sister into her arms, "you are the person I should have been sent for to nurse, it appears to me. But I suppose *your* malady is only sentimental."

Mrs. Corbett, with all a happy married woman's interest in a love affair, was full of curiosity in regard to Starolyi; tortured Dora with questions about him; and was never tired of lamenting that she had arrived just one day too late to see him. "He might have waited to make the acquaintance of his future sister-in-law. Of course, I shall work with you, Dolly, to overcome Aunt Damer's objections, and I hope that one day you will present me at the Court of Vienna as a reward for my services," laughingly said Di, whom Mrs. Damer had not yet let into the secret of Arthur Lestrange's hints, or her own suspicions.

In the course of the afternoon came Clarice Ferrers to enquire after Mrs. Damer, call upon Mrs. Corbett, and—talk about the Count.

"Such a dreadful loss! We were so sorry to hear that he had to go. But of course the Emperor needs his services. We shall all miss him—even you, Dora, for I think he used to come here occasionally?" said the brunette.

"He used to come every day," answered Dora, with more asperity than prudence.

"Dear me!" remarked Clarice, and looked considerably taken aback. "To enquire after Mrs. Damer, I suppose? He always said he liked her so much."

"Did he?" said Dora, rather astonished in her turn.

"He appears to have concealed his feelings with great success," observed Di maliciously.

Clarice surveyed them with a complacent smile. "He was very reserved. I fancy foreigners often are. But he became latterly so intimate with—ah—us, that he confided to us all his feelings and all his plans."

"Not *all*, I fancy," said Mrs. Corbett, instinctively ranging herself on her sister's side. "For instance, you did not apparently know that he was going until he was gone."

Miss Ferrers deigned to make no reply to this, and with an elaborate air of indifference, began to talk of something else. But when she was leaving, she dropped a few more hints to Dora on her way from the hall-door to the garden-gate.

"It is nice weather now, is it not? Are you thinking of going soon to the sea-side?—We?—Oh! I really do not know yet what my mother and the children will do. I shall probably go abroad."

"With friends?" questioned Dora, in some amazement. People in Farnleigh—unlike the rest of the world—still considered "going abroad" in the light of a great event.

"With friends?" repeated Clarice. "Um!—well! with a *friend* at any rate. What lovely Cape jessamine!" and she plucked a spray.

"Put this geranium with it. May one ask the name of this mysterious friend?" asked Dora, playfully enough. But her fingers trembled a little, as she held out the scarlet blossom.

"All in good time, my dear. At present I am bound to secrecy." And with a light laugh of triumph, Miss Ferrers brushed her friend's soft cheek with her lips and darted into the road. The shadows danced up and down Clarice's slight figure as she walked, making odd, shifting patterns, now on the top of her linen sunshade, now on the flounces of her muslin-dress. Dora stood there, her heart full of heavy doubt. She was a fool, she told herself, to pay any attention to Clarice's words. The brunette was always hinting at her conquests. Max had naturally said that he hoped to meet her again, and on this slender foundation she had built up some brilliant future. Dora felt angry. And this anger supplied the fillip that was needed to her resolution. Starolyi had never appeared so indispensable to her happiness as now, when, for a moment, she had questioned his allegiance.

She looked at her watch. It was past five. In another half-hour the express left: she must be quick if she wished to accomplish her purpose. Her heart beating higher now with defiance than even with excitement, she hastily gained her room, and began her preparations. They were brief. She took from her writing-case the letter which she had already composed to Di, with the intention of sending it by a messenger from the station; thrust a few things into a bag,

and with only one sharp pang on passing her aunt's closed door, she slipped down stairs, through the open door into the garden, and then set off running along the lonely road, at the pace of Orestes pursued by the Furies. The down-express from London arrived about five, and, as the finer folks of Farnleigh were not much in the habit of travelling by night, the fugitive hoped to find the station nearly deserted. On arriving there, however, and taking her ticket, a few words addressed by the station-master to one of his subordinates revealed to her that something was amiss on the line. She presently received an explanation.

"You must have a few minutes' patience, Miss. The down-express is not yet in, and the up-train will consequently be a little late in starting. There has been a stoppage before Swindon—nothing serious, I *think*."

This was very unwelcome news to Dora. Her courage, born of excitement, was fast ebbing, and she feared to meet, among the passengers from London, some acquaintance who would be much astonished to find her starting at such an hour and alone. She would willingly have hidden herself, but of that there was no possibility. The station was a small one, and everybody who came and went had no choice but to pass through the waiting-room where Dora sat. As the minutes went on her nervousness rose to agony. When, at last, the train steamed in and the tramp of feet along the platform followed, she cowered in her corner, like a hunted hare. To continue sitting where she was, opposite the door, was impossible. In despair, she sprang up and set herself to appear absorbed in study of the time-tables on the wall. She stood thus, motionless, turning crimson to the tips of her ears, while one arrival after another hurried through the room. Finally the steps ceased; and Dora hoped that all the passengers had vanished. The bell for the departure of the up-train rang, and she was feeling that, whatever was to happen now, she must make a rush for safety, when suddenly she recollected that she had not sent her letter of explanation to Di!

"Bristol—Swindon—change for London. Look sharp, Miss! You'll be late," exclaimed a guard to the scared and flurried girl.

"Oh, please!" cried Dora, in great distress, "you must wait a minute, please! I want a messenger. See! here is a letter. It must be taken to Vine Lodge, directly, and given into Mrs. Corbett's own hands. Not Mrs. Damer's, mind, for the world."

"Can I do your commission for you?" suddenly asked a voice which could not have terrified Dora more if it had been the trump of doom. And there, at her elbow, puzzled and profoundly astonished, stood Arthur Lestrange! "Where are you going?" he asked, as the girl mechanically put out her hand to him.

"To—to London," said Dora, floundering helplessly into the exact truth.

"Then—?" began Arthur, but broke off and glanced at the

letter which she still held. He felt that he had no right to question her.

"Time's up, Miss. We can't wait any longer, even for Miss Morton," at this moment interposed the station-master. Dora gave a gasp of despair, thrust the letter into the hand of the perplexed guard, and seized her bag. Lestrange's steady glance incensed her. She turned from him impatiently, made a dash for a first-class carriage, sprang in, and sank upon the cushions more dead than alive!

"She's up to some mischief, and, by Jingo! I'll go after her," said Lestrange to himself, and crying to a horrified and irate official: "I will pay at Swindon!" he, too, reached a vacant compartment, and leapt in as the train was already in motion.

While being whirled along to Swindon, Lestrange had time to arrive at certain conclusions, based upon Mrs. Damer's telegram of the previous day, and a letter of fuller explanations which he had received from her that morning. His plan of action was consequently matured by the time that the train had arrived at the junction. Descending with precaution so as not to be seen by Dora, whom he easily dogged on the crowded platform, he hurried to the telegraph office and sent two despatches—one to Mrs. Damer, to reassure her; another to London. Then he paid his fare, lighted a cigar, and entered a smoking-carriage in a calmer frame of mind. Sitting well back, he caught a fresh glimpse of Dora as she hurried past, and a rush of tenderness swelled his heart at the sight of the pale little face and lovely figure.

And, indeed, the poor girl was by this time in a pitiable frame of mind. The meeting with Lestrange had thoroughly unnerved her. The journey seemed eternal to her, excited and worn out with emotion as she was; and when, finally, at midnight the train reached Paddington, and her eager eyes detected her lover in the crowd under the gas-lamps, she jumped out and ran to him like a panting stag to its refuge.

"My brave darling!" exclaimed the Hungarian; and with a thrill of, perhaps, the truest feeling he had ever known, took Dora's icy-cold, trembling hands in his.

"William Ford, I arrest you in the Queen's name," said an easy voice behind him. Starolyi started and turned with a livid face. A quiet-looking individual in plain clothes took him by the shoulder, and, with a significant gesture, exhibited a slip of printed paper. Suddenly, as if they had risen from the ground, two constables appeared and produced a pair of handcuffs. Arthur Lestrange's grave, pale countenance also disengaged itself from the surrounding crowd. And the "Count" knew that, after many doublings and manifold escapes, in a moment of sweetest triumph his fate had overtaken him, and he stood face to face at last with the avenging majesty of the law!

"Max! what is this? What do these men mean? There is some mistake!" cried Dora, so bewildered that she only recovered her

powers of speech when the handcuffs were already round the adventurer's wrists.

"There is no mistake," said Arthur, compassionately, and drew nearer to her side.

She turned from him petulantly. How irritating he was! Of course there was a mistake.

"Max!" she cried in a sharp tone of agony, and stretched out her hand as though to cling to him.

"I must trouble you, madam," said the detective politely, and interposed his own arm between her and his prize. Max gave her one look; a gleam of softer feeling broke for an instant the set rage of his face; then he averted his head and, without a word, moved slowly away between his captors. Dora darted forward to follow him. But quick as thought Lestrange was upon her steps, and seizing her absolutely in his arms, held her until the police and their prisoner were lost to sight in the throng. She became easy enough to manage after that, poor soul! for she nearly lost consciousness, and submitted to be half-led, half-carried to a cab. Into this Arthur, giving an address to the cabman, got with her.

"I am going to put you under my sister's care for the night," he said kindly. "She is married and lives at Kensington."

The drive lasted a good half-hour, and during the whole of that time not an observation was exchanged. The lamplights flashing occasionally upon Dora's face showed her to Arthur with wide-open, tearless eyes whose despair made his heart ache. Once when his hand accidentally touched hers, she withdrew from the contact with a quick movement that spoke of resentment. And when the cab stopped at last, and Lestrange would have helped her to descend, she brushed his proffered arm aside and walked into the house before him with a stately step and erect head.

Their arrival, of course, excited great surprise; but fortunately Mr. and Mrs. Courtenay had been having a party, and consequently were but just thinking of going to bed. Arthur's sister—who was very like him—only required half-a-dozen whispered words before she grasped the entire situation. Her greeting to Dora was most cordial; and Mr. Courtenay took the unexpected guest into the drawing-room, where, manfully bottling up his curiosity, he talked to her about the fineness of the night and kindred subjects of an inoffensive nature. Dora was perfectly civil to him, but as cold as an iceberg.

"May I go to my room now?" she asked, rising abruptly as Mrs. Courtenay and her brother entered.

"Certainly," answered the lady, kindly, and escorted her upstairs.

"Good-night!" said Dora, stopping short upon the threshold of the bed-room door. Her hostess probably comprehended all that there was of bitterness and shame in the proud young heart; for she had the tact not to press any attentions upon the girl, but just with a wish that she might sleep well, turned away and left her as quickly as

she could. Then Dora locked the door, and flinging herself upon the bed, gave vent in tears to the agony of humiliation, resentment and despair that for one interminable hour had filled her heart to bursting.

"I cannot—*cannot* forgive you!" cried Dora passionately, next day, to Lestrange. "You tell me he is unworthy—an adventurer, a forger. I do not believe it! I must have some better proof than your assurances."

"My assurances are based upon the revelations of Scotland Yard, unfortunately," said Lestrange, with (at last!) a touch of impatience in his tone.

Dora shrank visibly. "Scotland Yard is not infallible," she said, still bravely, but with a horrible sickening feeling of despair and disgust in her heart.

"Dear Miss Morton," said Lestrange earnestly, "do but believe how gladly I would speak a word of hope to you, if I did not feel that any false comfort now would only make your ultimate awakening the more bitter. In all this miserable business I have had but one thought, which was to save you ——"

"And to ruin *him*," burst in Dora excitedly. "It is easy to evoke morality and public justice and many other high-sounding aims which may serve as a cloak for personal resentment."

"Enough!" said Arthur, now thoroughly wounded, and rose from his seat. "The position of a rejected suitor is never a very agreeable or a very triumphant one, but it was left for me to learn, and for you, Miss Morton, to teach me, that it might be made the occasion of intolerable insult. If it pleases you to consider me a sneak, that you may exalt Count Starolyi into a victim, I must deplore your resolution, but it would be beneath me to contest it. There is, however, one point which I should like you clearly to understand, and which results from my altered position both towards you and towards the world."

Dora raised her tear-stained, and truth to tell, somewhat shame-stricken face from her handkerchief, and listened to him now with a mournful, nascent curiosity.

"When I offered you my hand," continued Arthur, in his low, steady tones, "I considered myself the heir to great wealth. Two days ago I knew with certainty that these expectations had vanished into thin air. Even had you honoured me by accepting me, I should have regarded such a change in my prospects as a reasonable motive on your part for withdrawing your plighted word. And this declaration should show you with how little hope of winning you at any time for my wife I interposed last night to save you, as I should have interposed to save the merest acquaintance, from a future of disgrace and ruin."

He took his hat—bowed—and left her. Left her roused for an instant from the contemplation of her own woes, startled, compassionate, remorseful and ashamed!

But the humiliation of those first days following Starolyi's, or rather Ford's arrest, was nothing compared to what Dora had to suffer after her return to Farnleigh. Her aunt, indeed, and the still dumb-foundered Mrs. Corbett welcomed the returned fugitive with the utmost kindness; and from the moment that they first received her again into their arms, they made not the smallest allusion to her escapade or its cause. But, as her attempted elopement had been kept a profound secret, and her absence explained by a visit to a friend, Dora could not escape wherever she went from the intolerable suffering of hearing her late lover abused. For the news of his arrest travelled down to Farnleigh two days after his departure; and the little town gradually awoke to the fact that it had nourished a viper in its bosom.

Incredulity was the first sentiment. Like poor Dora, everybody said there *must* be a mistake. An error of identity would account for the whole thing. Mrs. Damer explained that Arthur Lestrange, on meeting the adventurer at the Straceys', had recognised him as a man whom he had known some two years previously in America, where he passed as the Honourable Mr. Grenville. Under this name he had enjoyed a brief but brilliant career, and had been within an ace of marrying the richest heiress in California. Of course, said Farnleigh, here was the solution of the whole mystery. Mr. Lestrange was responsible for having had an innocent man arrested. It was understood that he had found out in some odd way that the Count was to be at Paddington Station on a particular night, and had communicated the fact to the police. They had, an hour previously, discovered what they considered the last link in the chain of evidence, and had hastened in consequence to effect the arrest. It was plain that the whole thing had been done in too great a hurry. The zeal of Scotland Yard was easy to understand, but, really, Mr. Lestrange's —Farnleigh shook its head, and looked, not merely volumes, but a whole encyclopædia of unutterable things.

Unfortunately, just about this time Mrs. Damer got her answer from the Consul, who apologised for his delay. He stated that there was indeed a Count Starolyi whose age corresponded to that of the pretender, and who had been for three years past shut up in a lunatic asylum in a remote corner of Hungary! The Consul added that this young nobleman, a few months before going mad, had been robbed by his secretary—an Englishman—who had levanted with a large sum of money, many of his employer's private papers, and all his decorations.

This was a blow indeed! The pluckiest among the ladies apart, very few had the courage now to defend the too seductive stranger.

As for the officers—who, it may be remembered, had never believed in him—they assumed quite the airs of the Prussian army in Paris. People looked mournfully at the soi-disant Hungarian's splendid

presents. "Poor fellow! at least he was very generous," said the most indulgent.

But even this remaining drop of consolation was denied at last to the cup of their bitterness.

There was one general groan of rage and consternation when the bills for all the elegant gifts bestowed by the "Count" upon his hosts arrived from the county-town—addressed to the presentees! The jewellers, florists, picture-sellers and stationers, cross-questioned, exhibited the orders given by "Starolyi" in the names of the persons whom he had delighted to honour. Then it was that with one accord Farnleigh fell foul of the unfortunate Mr. Stracey. This gentleman (smarting under the knowledge that if he wished to keep some proof-engravings of which he had been extremely proud, he must pay for them) became quite apoplectic at last every time his late guest's name was mentioned. All that anybody managed to elicit from him was that he had met Ford in a theatre in Paris. Between the acts, and as a consequence of some interchange of programmes and opera-glasses, the two had fallen talking; and Mr. Stracey having mentioned "old Starolyi" as a former friend of his, his new acquaintance declared himself to stand to that defunct nobleman in the relation of a son.

"Most imprudent of Mr. Stracey, I must say!" remarked, to Mrs. Damer, an elderly maiden who, never having had any bouquets, was rather inclined to enjoy the dénouement. "Myself, I was always convinced that this man was an impostor, were not you?"

"Honestly, I cannot say that my suspicions went so far as that. And, Miss Tilney, I should think even yours were of recent origin," said Mrs. Damer, remembering how her visitor had moved heaven and earth to have the Straceys' friend introduced to her.

"Not at all—not at all! I suspected him from the first. They say he will have twenty-five years' penal servitude—Bless me! Dora, how pale you look. One would almost think—Have you heard about Clarice Ferrers? Found out in a clandestine correspondence with this wretch. Madly in love with him, my dear Mrs. Damer! What the girls of the present day are coming to! they will be falling in love with murderers next. I always told Mrs. Ferrers that she should look a little more sharply after that pert minx, Miss Clarice. I am assured she used to meet this—he! he!—forger, every night at the entrance-gate of the Straceys' paddock, and in a month she was to have joined him in Guernsey. You have heard, of course, he left so suddenly because some grand swindling enterprise in Paris collapsed. No? then you have not read the papers? I will send them to you. They will amuse Dora. Good-bye, child. You are losing all your roses, and your complexion is everything to you. I should prescribe change of —he! he!—scene."

This is a specimen of what poor Dora had to endure, while the leaden weeks crawled on before Ford's trial—each hour in them being

marked by some new agony in her long torture. How she lived through the pain, the infinite humiliation, she never knew. But she came out of the ordeal with a strengthened character and nobler aims. And, at last, her greatest sorrow was caused, not by the recollection of the love that she had lavished on an impostor, but of the injustice of which she had been guilty towards a friend.

For the next two years Lestrange, working hard at literature in London, came but little to Farnleigh. His aunt and uncle, though full of pride in their tardily-born heir, were as fond of him as ever, and he was as glad as ever to be with them. But he was resolute to win his own way to fortune, and his efforts left him scant leisure for a country life.

Dora and he met finally at a dinner-party at the Straceys. They sat next to one another at table, but did not find very much to say. *She* noted with a remorseful pleasure how gentle his manner was to her. *He* felt an emotion that surprised himself on observing that she was paler and graver, if lovelier than of old. After dinner, by accident they found themselves alone in the conservatory—that conservatory so odious to Dora because connected in her mind with "Starolyi." As she stood there a whirl of recollections assailed her. Lestrange was speaking. She did not heed him. A little disappointed, perhaps, he was moving away, when the girl, desperately collecting her courage, said eagerly, "Please, stay!"

He turned, surprised at the agitation of her tone.

"Stay just one moment, Mr. Lestrange. I may not again have an opportunity; and I have so longed to be able to speak to you. Once, in that dreadful time, you were very, *very* good to me; and I was unjust and insulting to you. No, don't interrupt me, *please.* I must say it. I don't suppose you will care about my being sorry; that is not much good to you; but I am sorry, and I was so five minutes after I spoke those horrible words. And ever since I have wanted to tell you so, and to ask you to forgive me. And—do you think you ever can?" Dora, feeling that she had made the most idiotic speech possible, blushing and mortified at herself, put out two eager little hands.

"What would I *not* forgive you?" said Lestrange; and taking her hands, kissed them.

"I congratulate you, my dear," some months later said Miss Tilney when Dora was engaged. "For do you know, I feared once that you were fretting for 'that Charming Count.'"

ABOUT NORWAY.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland."

On the Road to Vetti.

IT was already a bright morning when, between three and four o'clock, we were aroused by the uncanny woman from too short a slumber after our return from the Vettifos. Opening the door without ceremony, and putting down our boots with a clatter that would have aroused a regiment of Dutchmen, she muttered some cabalistic words and withdrew.

Ten minutes afterwards, the door was once more abruptly opened; she brought in a tray of coffee, which she laid upon the table, and condescending to utter a "Vor so got!" again retired. We had begged this coffee the previous night of the landlord, as a special favour; he had become our intercessor with the woman, and she, with an ill grace she took no pains to conceal, had finally nodded assent. But, grace or no grace, we were grateful; she was evidently a woman of her word, whatever her failings might be; and it is just possible that she thought it hard lines to have to turn out at 3.30 a.m. to make coffee.

It was certainly hard lines to us, that early rising. But several days would elapse before the steamer would again start for Bergen, and as we could not afford to lose the time, no choice was left us in the matter. We packed, and drank our coffee, our windows wide open, the daylight broad and full, early though it was, and in spite of the barren heights that overshadowed the inn, and prevented one from drawing a deep breath; within sound of those trickling waterfalls that night and day kept up an unceasing chatter,

until you seemed haunted by some familiar and restless spirit of the air. We drank our coffee, I say, and as its aromatic vapours, like incense, ascended, our hearts softened towards the gloomy woman, whose motto seemed to be "Deeds, not words." Then, all ready, we departed.

The men who had rowed us yesterday from Aardal were waiting at the door, took our luggage and hurried down to their little boat. The village slumbered; nor man nor dog stirred; not a chimney sent forth its thin cloud of blue peat smoke to announce that the cottage inmates had awakened to another day; not a sound disturbed the echo of our footsteps. In silence we were rowed to the steamer, and turned our backs upon Laerdal—as we thought for ever.

But in Norway you must be certain of nothing; above all, never be certain that you have said farewell to a place for the last time. We never doubted but that we should see Laerdal no more; yet fate willed that we should one day return, and be detained some days under the crushing weight of those mountains, and the monotonous sound of the waterfalls. Many things as well as many people will not bear too close a contact, too intimate a familiarity.

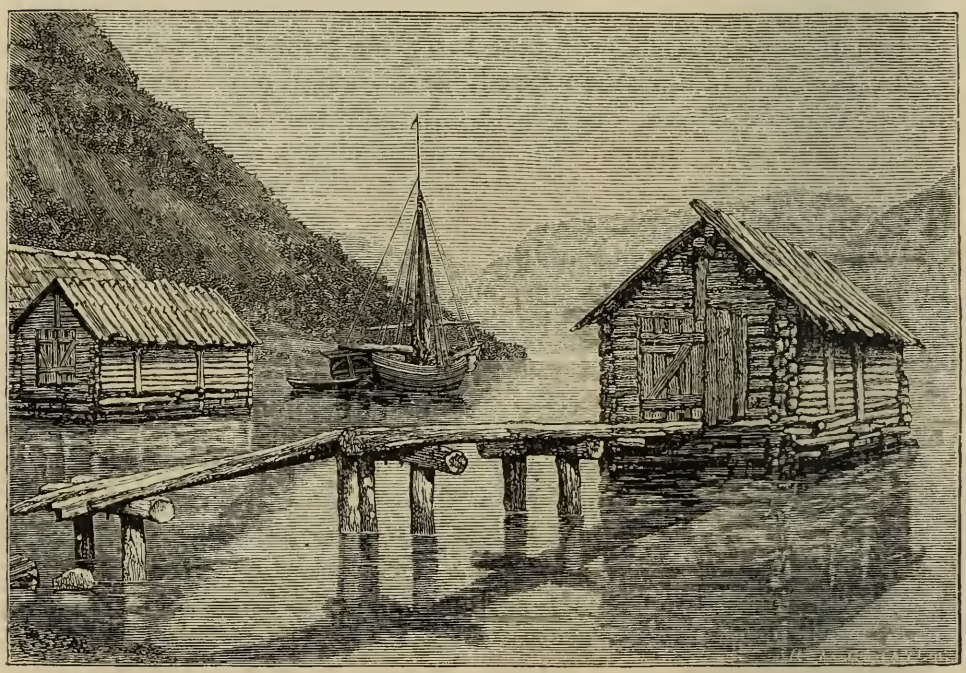
We were only just in time for the steamer. A few minutes after getting on board she left her moorings; and soon we found ourselves out in the deep waters, surrounded by the wild mountains. On her way to Bergen the steamer would call at many places, but not at Aardal. Thus we should not again see the quaint village and Jens Klingenberg, father and son. We even caught no distant view of the place in passing the arm of the fjord that led up to it; but, steaming onwards, found ourselves on new waters and amidst new scenes.

The Sogne Fjord may be compared to a great tree, the main body forming the trunk, and the inlets the branches. In these inlets the best of the scenery will be found. On the broad water you have nothing but the barren mountains on all sides, wild and desolate, gloomy and severe. But many of the inlets lead up to charming spots, rich with verdure; slopes of laughing fields, interspersed with vast pine forests, and cataracts that rush down the mountains in long unbroken threads of white tumbling foam. Sunny valleys and passes divide the hills, run upwards and turn out of sight, as if to lure you to their far-off beauties: as lure you they do. One of the pleasantest things in Norway is to take such a fjord as the Sogne, there pitch your tent for a month, and become thoroughly acquainted with its most favoured spots, which cannot well be seen under other circumstances. For they lie hid from view, and, like the best things and the best natures of earth, are found in their modest retirement only by long seeking.

One lovely spot: where the sun was pouring down his hot rays upon the glinting trees that threw their shadows upon the grass, beyond which sylvan retreat a pine forest tempted you with its cool depths: was the neighbourhood of Frithiof's Saga. The landing

stage was crowded with people, and the bowing that took place between those on board and those on the pier was in the highest degree amusing and absurd. Twenty, thirty times each man would take off his hat, replacing it firmly on his head between every bow. This bowing is a thorough institution in Norway from north to south: I think the fact has already been stated: it occupies a considerable portion of their time, which might be thus divided:—So many hours a week for the duties of the table, so many for sleeping, so many for work, so many for play: an equal proportion for bowing.

Until all this bowing was done, not a thing could be attended to in the way of business: and, business over, the boat could not start

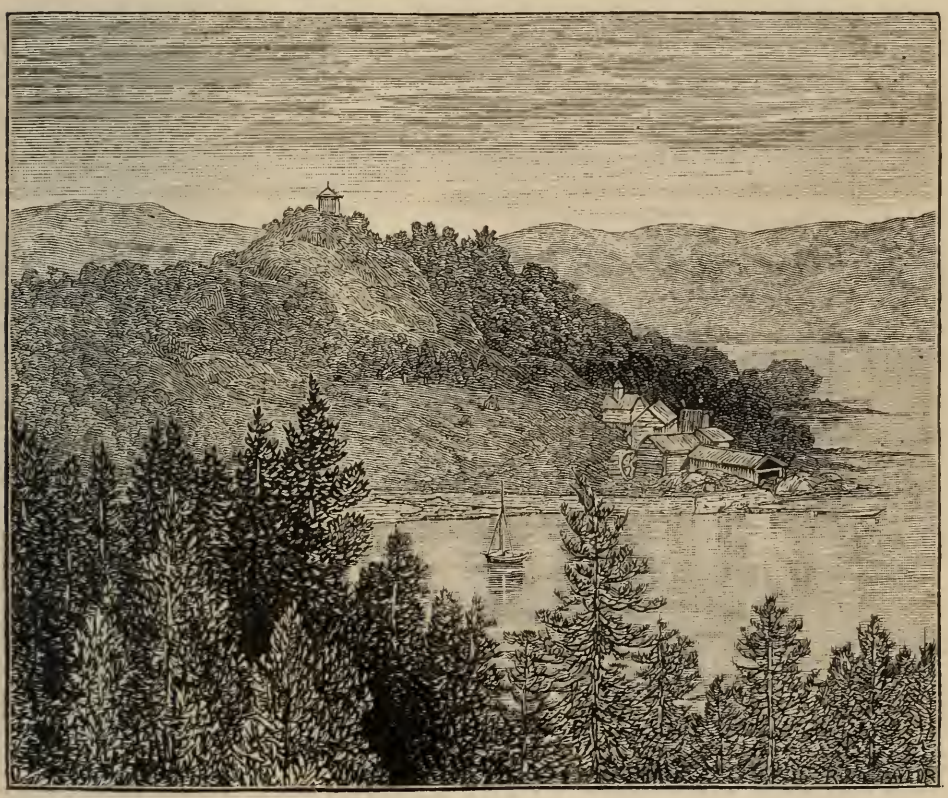


On the Sogne Fjord.

until the bowing was once more gone through from beginning to end. One felt reluctant to leave so lovely a spot. Behind us were huge mountains of bare granite looking hazy in the sunshine, and seeming to tower into the broad, bluey-white intensity of the midday sky, like the pinnacles of some far-off celestial temple. On the other side, again, were immense mountains covered with snow, and in the midst of this snow-field might be distinguished the blue ice of the everlasting glaciers. As we looked, a party of climbers were approaching it. With the aid of strong glasses we watched them turn and pause and look down upon us—no doubt in every sense of the word—from their superior height.

There was a party of people on board, half English, half Swedish, from having lived long years in Sweden. The girls were magnifi-

cent in golden hair and rainbow dresses, and proved that fair syrens may qualify themselves for flirting just as much in Sweden as in England. They were very lively, with little ripples of laughter, occasionally breaking out in a chorus that was perhaps rather noisy. One of them, of a sentimental turn, devoted her attention to the scenery, and, despite the utter indifference of the others to the beauties that surrounded us on all sides, shot forth minute guns of: "Girls, attention! oh, do look! this is too beautiful! this is quite too exquisite! this is *too*, TOO charming! oh, those delicious mountains!" —addressed, perhaps, to a gigantic mass of frowning granite, full of



NEAR BERGEN.

solemn lights and shades. Exclamations that, coming in the midst of such scenes, were like a jarring discord intruding upon the grandest harmony.

This young lady evidently thought otherwise, and in the loveliest parts of the journey would give vent to her fine feelings by the above recorded exclamations, reiterated over and over again. The next morning, on visiting the picture-gallery in Bergen, we found they had been before us, and the gentleman had signed himself in the Visitors' Book, as "Jeremiah Brown, Esquire." Well, it is certain that Jeremiah Brown, Esquire, and his party were very lively that day on board: and as they expressed their full intention of returning again next year to those scenes which raised in them such deep but not

silent emotions, it is not improbable that some happy members of the travelling community—perhaps kindred spirits—may fall under the influence of those lovely blue eyes, and golden hair, and little ripples of laughter, varied by pensive sighs and gushing enthusiasm: all so many feminine darts wherewith to pierce the heart and destroy the peace of the more susceptible portion of mankind.

All day long we were steaming about the Sognefjord, the wildest and most severe of all the Norwegian fjords: but not possessing the unrivalled beauty and luxuriance of the Hardanger. The one has the savage grandeur of the north—fit home for the Vikings: the other has the softer aspect of a more southern atmosphere. The freaks of nature are no more to be relied on than the changing moods of the wind or the smiles of a spoilt beauty. The greater part of the time we were out on the broad waters, but occasionally turned up into an inlet where little wooden sheds were built out at the end of short wooden piers, and threw their reflections deep down into the surface of the brilliant water. Here we would stop at a station, land passengers and take on others, and now and then hoist an old cow into the hold. At one of these stations, just as we had started, a cavalcade consisting of half-a-dozen carrioles came tearing down the valley path, and a shouting ensued that might have waked the Seven Sleepers. It was the only time I ever saw Norwegians really excited; and evidently they were ashamed of themselves, for as soon as the noise had had the desired effect and the steamer had put back, half the little crowd watching us on the pier turned tail and departed.

The latter part of the journey was less interesting than the former. The mountains fell away as we neared the sea, and we passed through flat islets and narrow channels, with here and there a cluster of picturesque houses or a quaint lighthouse upon some solitary rock. Occasionally we passed boats laden with wood, whose curious forms seemed to take us back to the days of the Greek galleys. Towards evening, a party of young Norwegian women on board sang an evening hymn, and had a little religious service amongst themselves, their faces turned seawards; primitive, indeed, but pleasant to witness, so earnest and devotional was their attitude. Only amongst these far-off people—and their lives are so quiet and isolated, that to all intents and purposes they are very far-off—do we see the simple manners of our forefathers reflected in force. But the people of a mountainous country are always more religious than those of the lowlands. It may be that these grand and noble objects of nature, have a corresponding influence upon the minds and hearts that live beneath their shadows.

This band of young men and women landed at the last station we called at, having shaken hands with one another all round as soon as their hymn was over. It was not very beautifully sung; the Norwegian peasants have no idea of music; but it was sung with quiet

energy, and to an old tune often heard in our own churches in England. It was strange indeed to hear it so far away amidst these rude and primitive scenes, echoed from every nook and corner of the rocks, and floating away towards the mountains. An incident to have pleased John Wesley, who would have joined in with the heartiest of them.

Soon after this, we, too, came to our last stage. It was about ten o'clock at night, and the glory of the day was setting. But the twilight could not conceal the extreme beauty of the situation of Bergen. It lies under the shadow of great hills, with houses reaching far up the green slopes. The port stretches up into the town, and gives shelter to a multitude of vessels.

As we made way, Mr. Jeremiah Brown fell into a sad error. A boat manned by sailors, looking as smart as if they belonged to a man of-war, had pushed out a very little from the shore. The sailors were resting upon their oars. "Look, girls!" cried the excited and delighted Mr. Brown. "There is the Herr Captain Smidt. That is his boat, and those are his men. And there he is himself in the stern. He has done this in our honour. Dear me! how attentive and polite of him to be sure!" concluded the gratified old gentleman. "Wave, girls! wave your handkerchiefs to the Herr Captain Smidt. I will do the same!" The waving that ensued, both of hands and umbrellas was frantic; but the more frantic the waving, the less the boat responded. "Very funny, girls!" cried the perplexed Mr. Brown. "Very strange that the Herr Captain Smidt does not return our salute! He must be shortsighted."

And then as we took a slight turn nearer the shore, and passed quite close to the little boat, the frightful discovery was made that it was a case of mistaken identity, and that all this waving and enthusiasm had been thrown away upon utter strangers. One quite felt for them, they looked so dejected and crestfallen, and so small.

By-and-by we all landed, Mr. Jeremiah Brown and party to adjourn to Holdt's Hotel, we to the Scandinavia. Our old friend Mr. B. with whom we had journeyed up the Spirillen, had strongly recommended this inn. "I always go to the Scandinavia," said he. "I always cultivate the beautiful and the splendid," he added, with a grandiloquent tone that in so simple, so kindly and philanthropical a nature was only amusing, but in anyone else would have been ridiculous. "When I wake in the morning," he went on, "I like to jump out of bed, pull aside the curtains, and immediately see before me on the one side the grand mountains, and on the other the life and beauty of the shipping. Ah, that is fine!" And he threw up his arms in enthusiasm.

So we promised to "descend" at the Scandinavia, where, he said, he should join us if we only stayed long enough, after having safely conveyed his sister into the keeping of her friends. A porter from the hotel, awaiting the arrival of the steamer, seized upon our

possessions. Passing between large warehouses, and mounting a short, steep hill, we at once came upon the Scandinavia.

It was certainly very dull and gloomy, and gave one the idea of a house whose glory had departed; a house living upon a past reputation, or that had been injured by the upspringing of a rival of more modern and fashionable pretensions. Holdt's hotel, we afterwards found, was better organised in every respect, more cheerful and comfortable. The Scandinavia was full of long, dark passages, that might well have been haunted by ghosts of the departed, but seemed certainly little troubled by the living. One solitary waiter appeared in possession of the place, showed us to our rooms, waited upon us

Fish Market, Bergen.

at table. We arrived on the Monday, and left on the Wednesday night, and certainly had nothing to complain of beyond the gloom and solitude of the house. As we were alone at meals, the one waiter could well attend to our wants, whilst at dinner the landlord came in and presided at the sideboard. But the "grandeur of the mountains" which had raised Mr. B.'s enthusiasm could not atone for the desolation within the house, that haunted it like a depressing atmosphere.

Bergen is a quaint and very picturesque old town, dating back to the 11th century: far quainter than Christiania, by which it has been superseded. It was once the capital of Norway, and for a time the Royal residence; but all this has now gone to Christiania. Yet it still remains a more important sea-port than the capital. It has a population of nearly 40,000 inhabitants. The streets as a rule are

quiet, and there is little noise or excitement going on within them—except when one of the heavy carts is charging over the stones with a deafening roar. The fish market in the early morning is a scene of great activity. The market is in the very centre of the town, on the great square, at the extremity of the harbour. Here in boats on the water, and in stalls on the land, the fishmen and fishwomen are pursuing a thriving and noisy trade. The housewives and servants of the town come down in strong force and bargain for the day's dinner. The spot is thronged with people, but not all on purchase bent: many come out of curiosity: to see the gathering of these clans: to watch the lively scene, and to take note of the picturesque

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costumes. It is a perfect Babel of sounds. Loud tones in all directions and in every key, productive more of discord than harmony.

It is a most curious and picturesque scene, full of life and animation, the very air itself loaded with the smell of the fish. Immediately in front of you, as you stand in the middle of the square, one of the great hills stretches its head high and wide, green slopes almost to the very summit. Half way up these slopes, so elevated that you wonder who has patience to climb them day after day, are quaint old houses, their red roofs standing out in rich and striking contrast with the green background of the hills: a panorama of life and beauty glowing freshly in the morning sun. To the left hand is the noisy fish market, and the townswomen young and old. Many of them in quaint Norwegian costumes are making their purchases with an

earnestness worthy of a greater if not a better cause. Conspicuous amongst them are the young women with the "snood": the badge of maidenhood in certain parts of Norway. It consists of red braid twisted round and round the plaits of hair, until the plaits are quite covered by it. It is then worn round the head like a coronet. A curious custom and not very becoming.

Beyond the fish-market is the forest of shipping, stretching all down the harbour, an ever-shifting scene as the vessels come and go; streamers of many countries are flying in the wind; all is sparkling, brimming over with healthful life. You catch the influence, and wonder how anyone can in such scenes, and breathing such air, ever grow as old and wrinkled as those old fishwomen that are brandishing their wares and disputing for a fraction of money. Every now and then, a cry of "Flöt!" comes from the shore, as someone appears at one of the narrow openings between the great warehouses—openings that are so many landing-stages—and the quick retort of "Ja vel!" rings across the water, and a boat shoots out in reply. But the sun is pouring down his intense rays upon all, and, early though the morning is, you feel that you are getting gradually baked. Quaint, lively, sparkling and original as the whole scene is, full of beautiful tone and colouring, you are glad to turn into a quieter street and cross over to the shady side.

The streets are many of them narrow and irregular. Openings from the pavement lead down into cellars, where people live and make boxes painted a glaring red decorated with gaudy and fantastic flowers and devices, with which the Norwegian peasants travel about the country. Boxes that hold a variety of articles: all their worldly wardrobe; food sufficient for a week or a fortnight's consumption, according to the length of the journey they are about to take; a bottle of beer or the brandy of the country (of which the less said, the better), and a knife to cut their food—a fork is a superfluous article of luxury with them. With such an outfit they are independent of everything and everyone; can travel a whole week or more by steamer, and have no expense during their voyage beyond their passage-money. The Norwegians, having very little money, are frugal and provident. They know its value and spend nothing in waste. The English, in the same rank of life, might learn a wise lesson from these descendants of the Vikings.

One of the great trades of Bergen is the stock-fish: into the mysteries of which I gained more insight later on than I cared for. The stock-fish is sent to all parts of the world, but chiefly to the Mediterranean and to Spain. It consists of cod-fish salted and dried to the consistency of a deal board, and its perfume keeps you as far as possible at a respectable distance. Many of the sea boats were in the harbour to-day, with their cargoes of roe and train oil. These arrive during the months of May and June; in July and August they come in with rock fish and dried fish. Strange vessels

with high prows, rounded at the end and curling like a dolphin's tail; differing little in fashion from the dragon ships used by the Vikings a thousand years ago.

At Bergen we were to take passage for the North Cape, a journey of seventeen days to and fro. We had a selection of steamers: and a Norwegian gentleman, to whom we had taken an introduction, showed us great kindness, escorted us about the town, and was of the utmost use to us. Here again we should have been nonplussed without such help, not knowing what to do for the best, and not being able to find out: just as, going down the Spirillen, our kind old friend Mr. B. had been everything to us in the first stages of our journey. At the hotel at Bergen, no one could give us the slightest information about the North Cape boats, and without Herr T. to pilot us into the right channel, we must have run the risk of a right or wrong choice.

Several companies run their vessels to the Cape, and the question for us was, which boat would be most comfortable, and in which should we gain the most and the pleasantest experience. We very soon decided in favour of the *Michael Krohn*, Captain Björnstad, of which Messrs. Gundersen and Schöning, were the agents in Bergen. The company especially study the pleasure and accommodation of their passengers. The cabins of the *Michael Krohn*, freshly fitted up, and the saloon, decorated with purple velvet cushions, and white panels relieved by gilt beading, had a bright and cheerful appearance not to be resisted. We were fortunate, too, in finding a little cabin vacant; the best, indeed the only real cabin on board; which held four berths, with room for a table, and a couple of chairs, and a moderate amount of luggage. This we secured exclusively to ourselves by the payment of three fares, according to the advertised rules of the company: an arrangement which made all the difference to the comfort of the journey.

This matter satisfactorily settled, we returned to shore with Herr T., strolled through the old parts of the town with him, and visited the picture-gallery, where the name of Jeremiah Brown, Esquire, and his bevy of fair damsels had become historical record for ever. The picture-gallery is not large, and contains no pictures of especial interest; but the Norwegians are not a very artistic people, probably for want of opportunity. It can be from no other cause in so intelligent a race. Their broad, well-developed foreheads denote sense and imagination, and minds that ought to be in sympathy with the æsthetic and beautiful. But a taste for the fine arts is not easily gratified, and unless a country patronises her artists to a considerable extent, that spirit of emulation which goes far to produce talent, at any rate, if not genius, is checked.

Genius will make its own way, and will not be repressed; but talent is not genius. Whilst the one will rise superior to all opposition and discouragement, the other often dies out for want of support. The

strength of the one is derived from itself; the other must be invigorated from without. The Danes of late years have certainly taken the lead in marine subjects, but England has largely patronised their productions. To stand before a masterpiece of Sorensen or Bille, is to see the moving of the water, to hear the surging of the waves, to feel the freshening breeze fanning your cheek. The Norwegians, on the other hand, give one the impression of a people of great artistic resources as yet undeveloped. They have little or nothing in their country to help them on. It has no past school of masters, like Italy, for instance, or Holland and Belgium. It has been isolated from all such advantages as much as it is removed in position from the more refined and civilised countries of the world. Even Sweden, a step lower down, is in advance of Norway. The latter has not even any architecture to boast of, with the exception of Throndhjem Cathedral, a building far from perfect in itself. No monuments of antiquity carry you back into the past, no ruins make the romance of the present. Throughout the country you see neither trace nor vestige of architectural beauty, and you long to bring an old abbey, such as Westminster, and place it in one of those grand valleys, where the eternal mountains tower heavenwards, and the never-ending torrents rush down in foaming cataracts. You want to bring such an abbey, the glory of man's handiwork, into comparison with those hills, the glory of creation.

Day after day, passing through such scenes, the eye hungers after some grand ruin to break the monotony of this eternal solitude, this unbroken sameness, beautiful as it all is; longs for a token of bygone life and activity and greatness in man. But in vain. Think what it would be to come upon such ruins as Raglan, or Tintern, or Heidelberg, in these vast stretches of lonely country; to visit them some night when flooded by moonlight; moonlight more brilliant than can be conceived in our less rarified atmosphere. People the ruins with an assembly of silent ghosts; ghosts creeping out at the dead hour. In solemn grey procession see them cross the moonlit plain, and disappear amidst the vast forests upon the slopes. Imagine them again issuing forth upon the mountain tops, working spells, or performing allotted penances; until, at the first flush of dawn in the east, they hasten back affrighted to their silent tombs.

We may imagine all this, but we do not see it. The Norwegians have not any past history of this kind; they never will have; and probably no one thinks about it or regrets it less than themselves. Life for them is, of necessity, eminently practical. I do not believe it is of choice. As I have already remarked, Norway owes nothing to man: her attractions are all her own: they date further back than all ruins, and will be in existence when our own proud ruins have crumbled away.

The days we spent in Bergen were so supremely hot that it was almost impossible to stir about, and we longed for the time when

we should be upon the water, revelling in such breezes as might be wafted to us straight from the North Pole. Yet, after a week of comparative isolation from one's fellows, a week of uninterrupted and desolate country, the change to the bright, quaint town, a return to something like civilisation and mankind, had been very pleasant. On the Wednesday night we went down to take our leave of Herr T., sat an hour with him on the verandah of his house, overlooking his gardens and the mountains across the water, down which, of course, small waterfalls were trickling; and then almost regretted the "bon voyage" which consigned us to the less certain because unproved quarters of our vessel.

The clocks were striking eleven when we went on board. The steamer was to have started at midnight, but of course was behind time: there was no chance of her moving for some hours. We turned in, therefore, but with little prospect of rest. Incessant noise went on; shouting, talking, disputing, and taking in cargo; whilst the "donkey engine" might have been sounds issuing from the infernal regions. At length, about 5 a.m., there were signs of motion, and, going up on deck to reconnoitre, we found the good vessel making her way through the forest of ships with the usual difficulties.

Nothing could exceed the beauty of the sky. Dream clouds, rose-coloured and ethereal, were floating over a surface of the most liquid, transparent blue. The fresh invigorating breeze of the early morning was especially delightful and exhilarating after the heat of the past two days. We took our last view of the mountains, and the town, and the red-roofed houses upon the slopes, that make Bergen so quaint and picturesque. Then, turning to the right, all went out of view as the good ship *Michael Krohn* steamed northwards.

MAD MATTY.

By Anne Beale.

A BELIEF in ghosts is common to most primitive people. The outlying districts of our town had their legends of ghosts and fairies; indeed no Welsh district is without them. But most of these were harmless from their antiquity, and even the peasants began to consider them as bygone tales. This, however, was not the case with ghostly stories originating within the memory of the living; for much terror was experienced by the ignorant and superstitious, concerning sights which had their origin in circumstances of recent date. Nor was it easy to convince them that flesh and blood were not spirit when once they had resolved that they were.

Mr. Superintendent Pryse was one of the Anti-spiritualists of his day, and during his long rounds, took almost as much trouble to run ghosts as criminals to ground. But he had a friend who occasionally came from a distance to visit him, who was as profound a believer as he was sceptical. They discussed the matter without coming to any conclusion; grew hot, grew cold, like the weather, but found the temperate degree unattainable.

"I am told that hundreds have seen the ghost that haunts Gwynant Bridge," said Captain Glyn, one day when the subject cropped up.

"Fools! they can't have seen it because they are afraid to cross the meadows," returned the Superintendent. "But women lose their wits and even their legs, when they do happen to near the spot."

"Have you ever seen it?"

"Yes; more than once; but I don't believe in it."

"I thought seeing was believing?"

"Not in the matter of ghosts. Our natural eyes are no more constructed to see into the spiritual world than they are into the animalcular. We haven't arrived at spiritual microscopes, eh?"

"No need. Ghosts are visible without 'em."

"We will go and look up the Gwynant ghost this evening," said the Superintendent. "She only shows about the full of the moon. It is a woman, you see; for all fools are feminine, except, perhaps, Captain Glyn, commander in her Majesty's navy."

The Captain would rather have confronted death on a raging sea than have sought a ghost by moonlight; but he was too proud to say so, and therefore acceded, unwillingly, to the proposal.

Mr. Superintendent Pryse took down his club and the heavy walking-stick whence he could draw a sharp weapon: then called majestic Gwen, his housekeeper.

"Tell Williams to wait here until ten; then, if we are not back, to follow us to Gwynant Bridge," he said.

'Where the ghost stands and talks, sir?" asked immovable Gwen; who, her master said, ought to have been a man.

"Yes. Come along, Glyn."

They set out between six and seven o'clock of a fine April evening, for a four-mile walk across country. The moon was rising, and would be at her full. Their way led them, first up a hilly road, beneath which a rapid river foamed and tumbled over rocks and stones, between trees that looked like an army of spirits in the shadowy light: then through a wood. Here myriads of blue-bells had folded themselves to sleep in the white light, and prim-rose-buds slumbered amongst their leaves, while, between the beam and breeze, it seemed that fairies tripped it among the silent flowers.

By the time they reached Gwynant Meadows the moon had risen, and had made of the dews that trembled on the grass-blades prisms of light. They trod them down as they crossed in the direction of the bridge. When they came within a few paces of the haunted spot, they halted involuntarily, and exclaimed together, "There it is!"

There it certainly was. Amongst the trees on the left side of the bridge stood a white, transparent figure, tall and immovable. One hand was outstretched, the other concealed by shadowy drapery. The most incredulous must have acknowledged that an apparition was before him—a pale, thin, luminous, motionless ghost.

"Enough. Come away," whispered Glyn.

"Not till we've seen what she's made of," returned Pryse aloud.

"Made of!" was audibly repeated by some mocking voice.

"She can speak, anyhow," said the Superintendent softly, breaking from the grasp of his trembling friend.

He walked towards the bridge, holding his official club in one hand, his stick in the other, resolute enough to frighten away any ghost. He did so in effect.

"I vow she's gone!" he exclaimed.

"Gone!" repeated the unearthly voice.

"No, she's here!" returned the Captain, and "Here," was the ghostly repetition.

"I say she's gone!" "I say she's here!" "Gone!" "Here!" was reiterated, until the wrathful Superintendent scarcely believed his senses. It was a new version of the fable of the chameleon.

At last he walked back to the Captain, and—there she was! pale, luminous, transparent. He stood awhile, silent and perplexed, then seizing the Captain, dragged him towards the bridge.

"There! didn't I say she was gone?" he cried, pointing to the group of feathery birch where no ghost was visible.

The Captain was almost more terrified by her absence than her

presence, and returned to his first stand-point, followed by the Superintendent.

"There she is again!" they both exclaimed, and "Again," repeated the mocking voice.

The spectre was once more visible, her arm still outstretched.

"You'll believe in future," whispered Glyn.

"Can't promise; but it certainly is mysterious. Stay where you are while I run her to ground," replied Pryse, so low that the ghost only murmured in reply.

He need have laid no command on the Captain, for the poor man was planted there: chloroformed, mesmerised, mediumised; only those hard words were not in use at the time, the march of discovery not having as yet begun to tramp in that direction at Trefavon.

While Glyn, medium-like, was fast falling into a trance from gazing at he knew not what, Pryse, policeman-like, was examining the spirit-haunt, as if it had been the hiding-place of an escaped convict. At another time he would have paused to admire the graceful birch, the rustic bridge, the brook that chattered to the moon, the sedges and mossy stones: but now, standing on tiptoe on the brink of the bridge, he only strove to grasp the topmost branch of the haunted tree. It evaded him, however, and he was more than once in danger of falling into the brook. But he was not a man to be daunted, and seized it at last. Securing a firmer footing, he drew the slight tree towards him, ruthlessly pulled the sharp knife from his stick, and began to hack and tug at the particular branch he had secured. After much exertion and determination he managed to sever it from the trunk.

"You've cut off her arm—and her head!" shouted Glyn, aroused from his trance.

"Her head!" shrieked the decapitated ghost.

Back went the Superintendent, and saw that all that remained of that much-abused apparition was the lower part of her transparency.

"I am sorry to have spoilt the tree, but glad to have laid bare its tricks," he said, as if he had caught a thief. "You see, Glyn, that the branches have grown into the skeleton of a human being, as seen from this particular spot and nowhere else. When the moon is full, she shines through the intervening space, and lights it into a spirit. A step this way or that dispels the illusion. I have lopped off the principal branch and destroyed the ghost."

"Come away," said Captain Glyn, testily, not caring to be convinced against his will.

Nevertheless the spectre had been an optical delusion, caused precisely as Mr. Superintendent Pryse had described it; but when, afterwards, the truth was noised abroad, the country-folk only said, "Well sure! there's brave Pryse, Super, is, to be killing a ghost! but she is talking all the same." The echo naturally remained after the tree was mutilated.

"I have a policeman stationed near here whom I must look up," said Pryse, as he crossed the stile between Gwynant Meadows and the road. "If you will walk on, I will join you by a short cut across the fields, at the end of the wood."

Glyn gladly assented, for he desired solitude to smooth his ruffled feathers. He felt aggrieved, and having been made superstitious in childhood by ignorant domestics, inclined to remain so in manhood. He almost believed that the ghost had been frightened away, and would re-appear elsewhere.

He was soon to be strengthened in this belief, for just before emerging from the wood, he was startled by something white, perched in one of the trees. As he paused, it slipped down and preceded him into the road, where it stood, as if awaiting him. Glancing at it in alarm, he perceived that it was the figure of a woman, and doubted not that it was the dislodged spectre.

Trembling all over, he tried to pass her by with an apologetic bow, being always chivalrously polite to the ladies. His civility was answered by a fantastic curtsey.

"I will accompany you, sir," she said, as he strove to hurry on. It was the voice of the tree-spirit, he thought.

"Certainly, madam, if you please," he replied, politeness struggling with terror.

She walked rapidly by his side, quickening her pace as he quickened his. When he ventured to look at her, he saw only a white face, white arms, white drapery. It was at least satisfactory, that the cruel executioner had not, after all, amputated a limb.

"I am going home; where are you going, sir?" she said, after a brief silence.

"To—to—to—Trefavon," he stammered.

"Ha, ha, ha! I live nearer," she cried in an unearthly voice.

He was thankful to hear it, and urged his failing legs to impossible efforts.

They had long passed the spot where his friend was to join him, and soon reached the cross roads.

"This way, sir," she said, waving her hand, and he took the wrong road in obedience to her spiritual influence.

They were now outside the parish of Trefavon, and the road led through a baronial property. In a lonely tree-embowered spot by the wayside stood a small church, or more properly, a chapel of ease to a distant church, which he had seen more than once, and which he had been told was haunted.

"Beware of Pryse, Superintendent," said the ghost, as they approached this place.

"I will—indeed I will," muttered the Captain, devoutly wishing he had never seen his old friend.

When they reached the churchyard gate, the spirit paused, and extended her hand towards the sacred building.

"Good-night, sir. I live here!" she said, and glided through the gate.

The spell-bound Captain saw her wander about a few moments in the moonlight, making fantastic movements, then vanish. When she finally disappeared, he fell heavily to the ground and fainted.

Meanwhile, the Superintendent had reached the trysting-place, and not finding him there, supposed he had walked on. He set off briskly to overtake him. His soldierly onslaught having taken much time, and a lecture to a temporarily missing policeman, more, it was later than he supposed. He was met by his trusty Williams.

"It can't be ten, surely?" he exclaimed.

"Half-past, sir," was the reply.

"Did you meet Captain Glyn?"

"No, sir."

"Then he has taken a wrong turning. We must go back."

They took the road to the chapel, where they found Glyn as we left him.

"A drunken man! How can we get him to the lock-up?" they both cried, poking him with their pastoral staves.

"Bless us, sir, it is Captain Glyn!" said Williams, leaning over the prostrate figure.

"Ghosts, not drink!" muttered Pryse, stooping also.

They uplifted him, and Williams, to the scandal of his chief, took a flask from his pocket, and administered what he and Dr. Jones called, a pick-me-up. This restored consciousness, but seeing that he looked like a man dazed and scared, the Superintendent moved him away from the chapel. Glancing into the graveyard as he did so, he himself saw the ghost. Nothing daunted he shook his club at the white figure, which instantly vanished.

"No wonder he had a fit!" he ejaculated, as he and Williams supported the Captain to a distance.

It took some time to restore him sufficiently for a walk to Trefavon, and he maintained such a determined silence, that his companions began to fear paralysis. He shook off his supporters, however, and finally moved homewards of his own accord, a policeman on either side.

"His speech is affected, poor gentleman!" whispered Williams.

"I shall never speak again!" groaned the Captain, which re-assured the constable, although he did not utter another word.

They reached Trefavon at last, and found supper and a good fire awaiting them. When Williams had withdrawn with his last orders, and a stately "Good night!" from his beloved Gwen, the spirit-seekers and finders were left alone. The Captain recovered his speech.

"You fancy you got rid of the ghost. You only sent it from one tree to another. I saw it again, walked with it, talked with it, till it vanished into that haunted chapel. I am as much in my right mind as you are."

"I saw it there also," said the Superintendent, soothingly, perceiving that Glyn was excited.

"Saw it? Then you own you have been wrong, and more obstinate than a mule. It bade me beware of Pryse, Superintendent."

"I am not surprised. But eat your supper, go to bed, and we will settle the question to-morrow by daylight. I am going past the chapel, and you must come with me. Not another word. I know what you are about to say is right; but I have an hour's work to do, and should like to see you in bed first."

"I should think it *was* right?" chuckled the Captain, taking up his candlestick, "but I've had enough of the chapel."

A good night's rest restored him to his usual spirits, and as ghosts did not walk by day, he consented to accompany the Superintendent on his rounds. They went on foot, and he did not fail to improve the occasion by lecturing his friend on his unbelief, who listened in much humility.

When they reached the little church, Pryse went into the churchyard without consulting Glyn, who, however, felt constrained to follow. He almost expected to see the spectre in the gloomy, ghost-ridden spot. He saw instead a woman standing by a neighbouring hut, or outhouse, who shrieked, and seemed about to run away when she perceived the visitors. The Superintendent laid his hand gently on her shoulder, with the words:

"Be good, and I will not harm you, Matty. Why will you frighten people at night?"

She began to cry and moan, when he drew a gay blue ribbon and a packet of sweetmeats from his pocket, which turned her lamentations into joy. She danced round him, took his hands, and showed him much affection. The Captain ventured near, and saw a strange, wild figure, enveloped in a many-coloured shawl which she wore like a mantle. Her face and hands were white, her matted locks long and fair, her eyes roving and lustreless, her lips colourless.

"This is your ghost," said the Superintendent, pointing to her, as she stood admiring her ribbon and eating her sweets. "This is poor Mad Matty."

She looked up at the sound of her name, but shrunk behind the Superintendent when she perceived a stranger close to him. She soon forgot him, however, in her new pleasures, and began to glide and dance about, holding up her ribbon, and moving in and out amongst the white-washed graves. It was Easter-tide, and the peasants, according to their custom, had tidied up their small inheritances, planted endless wall-flowers and polyanthuses, whitewashed the stones, and brightened the otherwise gloomy spot, Mad Matty assisting. It was no wonder that it looked ghostly in the moonlight.

"Yes, that is your ghost!" repeated the Superintendent, while the Captain was following with his eyes the movements of the bewildered

creature before him. "Sit down on this tombstone, and I will tell you her story. It is pathetic enough, though not supernatural."

The Captain obeyed, and the two men seated themselves on one of those large, flat, ugly slabs, raised a foot or so from the ground, on which friends were wont to chronicle the epitaphs of their dead.

"Matty, like all distraught women, is supposed to have been crossed in love," began the Superintendent. "I only wish that I could lay my club across the back of every man who deceives a woman. She had no friend patient enough to try to keep her wandering mind at home, so at last it strayed away altogether. Her relations lived in this neighbourhood, and, when her parents died, Matty was allowed to do much as she liked. Deprived of the shelter of their roof, she took possession of this shed, and has been undisturbed in it for twenty years at least; for she is older than she looks. Sometimes there seems method, at others mischief in her madness. Thanks to her, the ghost-stories connected with this spot have trebled. There are people, as you know, who don't pause to find out whether a ghost's a ghost; so Mad Matty must answer for many a fool."

Here the Captain winced.

"This churchyard is her home, and she likes it. She gets her dinner at the Squire's, and her clothes everywhere, terrifying or amusing the donors as the whim takes her and them. She always manages to secure a white garment, whether gown or bedgown, which she puts on at night. I imagine this to be habit—but others think it is done to frighten wayfarers. She has scarcely wit enough to carry on a system of terror, however, but changes her dress as she was accustomed to do when sane. Sometimes she sleeps in this hut, at others in the wood we passed through. Poor soul! She dreads neither ghost nor goblin, though I have seen her frightened at her own shadow in the moonlight. Perhaps this is why she climbs trees, and perches like a huge night-owl, till the shadows flee and daylight dawns. She is so sociable that she generally joins the passer-by, whether he be friend or stranger. Whichever it may be, he is sure to be terrified out of his wits; for her friends think she may attack them, and strangers take her for a ghost."

Here the Superintendent bowed significantly to the Captain.

"Of course the police force have no right to be afraid, either of man or ghost; so we are appealed to in emergency. More than once I have been asked to take her into custody, but the Squire's lady pities her as much as I do, and we get out of the warrant between us. Custody means an asylum, where she would soon die."

"So much the better," growled the Captain.

"No, sir. Let her live out her poor life, as the curs do, in her native air. One Sunday she went to church, and the wise sexton put her out. Had he let her alone, she would have sat quietly through the service, as she did when young; but as it was, she broke the windows. The police were sent for, but happily, she was

missing. Still, I am her bugbear; for, whenever she is troublesome, they say to her, 'Take you care, Matty, there's Mr. Superintendent Pryse;' and although she does not always recognise me, she, like the children—God bless 'em—has a needless dread of me. But I tell them it is our duty to see that men and women keep the peace, not idiots, babes and ghosts. To see this quiet little nook, one can scarcely believe in its evil reputation. The peasants cannot be got to pass it at night; but when compelled, betake themselves to curious expedients. A charwoman, who was engaged to do a day's washing at the parsonage, made an original one. Having been obliged to go by the chapel before daylight on a winter's morning, she was asked how she managed. 'I took an umbrella with me, opened it, and held it between me and the churchyard, then stuck it in the hedge till I came back,' she answered proudly. Perhaps, Captain, if you had had your umbrella up you wouldn't have fainted."

This cruel cut was not necessary, for the Captain had been watching Mad Matty and listening to her story until he was ashamed of himself.

"To have fainted at sight of that demented creature!" he reflected, while the Superintendent continued, and Matty danced up to them, the ribbon twisted in her hair, the sweetmeats devoured, a piece of wall-flower in her hand.

"You see what kindness does. She would never fear me, and I should have influence over her, if the idiots would let us alone."

"I will give her half-a-crown," said the Captain, putting his hand into his pocket.

"She will only throw it away. She no longer understands the value of money. Colour and sweetness are all she cares for now; and she even ripped to pieces and scattered a bed that some charitable person had placed in her shed."

The Captain drew forth a magnificent coloured-silk handkerchief, which instantly attracted poor Matty's attention. He rose and presented it to her with a bow. She received it with a curtsey which she might have practised for a presentation at Court, it was so low and sweeping. The Superintendent, who was a reader of old books when he had time, thought of Sterne's "Maria," and how she had treasured his handkerchief, and dried the tears it had wiped, in her bosom.

"Matty does not know the relief of tears," he said, half aloud. "Her wild eyes are dry. Still, as Maria said to Sterne, 'God tempers the winds to the shorn lamb.' She is happy in your handkerchief, Glyn."

"God help her," said the kind-hearted Captain, turning away to hide a tear. "I wish with all my soul she were only a ghost after all."

She was happy; and so we will leave her: with a prayer that God will continue to "temper the winds" to the lambs forsaken by all save Him.

IN THE ABBOT'S SEAT.

By the Author of "Our Lady of Tears."

LOOKING the very impersonation of contented idleness, Frank Carew lay on the hill-side above the ruined Abbey of Furness, and pondered the embodiment in canvas and pigments of the fancies with which the June sunset had inspired him. For three of the brightest of summer weeks the young A. R. A. had occupied himself in multiplying sketches of the Abbey ruins, until scarcely a feature of their beautiful decay but was lodged in his portfolio. The chapel was there, roofless, windowless, its altar gone, grass clasping closely the few gravestones that remained; but as majestic in its desolation as ever it had looked in those days of Catholic prosperity when the Cistercian monks of Furness chanted prayers for the souls parted from that dust over which their feet were treading.

Carew lay dreamingly under his favourite tree, looking down on the grey stillness of the Abbey, and trying to give substance to the shadowy fancies that connected themselves in his mind with the cawing of the black choristers opposite. At length he started up with an exclamation.

"I have it—I have it. Time, midnight; the moon at its brightest; the ghost of old King Harry just stealing into the chapel; and a crowd of rooks perched on the sedilia, and cawing curses on the robber who left the central niche of the three seats empty of an Abbot. 'King Harry the Eighth visiting the Abbey of Furness.' If my right hand remembers its cunning, I'll hold my own in the Academy next May."

A downward scramble among trees, bushes, and bits of crumbling masonry, and Carew crossed the arch into the ruins. A light laugh struck upon his ear.

He sprang up the wall, and looked towards the sedilia. Apparently the scene actually revealed was more satisfactory than that for which the laugh had prepared him, for he at once leaped down into the chapel and walked towards the stone seats to his left.

A figure in no way ghostly had already risen from the central niche of the three worn recesses that still adorn the ruined chapel of Furness; and, with great brown eyes bent shyly on the intruder, seemed doubtful whether to remain or not. This successor to the Abbots of old days wore as unpretendingly tasteful a dress as an English girl of eighteen summers could figure in, and had a face of the order that one hesitates whether to call plain or handsome, and ends by pronouncing signally attractive. A Madonna done in marble might have had those tintless cheeks and that look of seriousness.

"So it was you that laughed, Miss Margaret," said Carew. "It's a sin to waste such sweet sounds on the Abbey ghosts. I protest I'll paint you as Medusa, if you go on keeping tryst and making merry with the Furness ghosts, while every-day mortals like Frank Carew can't get so much as a smile from you."

"I've known Furness, and its ghosts, and its legends, ever since I was old enough to walk from our cottage to the ruins," said the girl somewhat coldly. "Mr. Carew and I have only been acquaintances for a matter of three weeks past."

"The pleasantest weeks in Mr. Carew's life! I was thinking to have ended my stay here in another three weeks or so; but something the Abbey spectres whispered to me just before I intruded on you inclines me to make the three weeks three months. Will you be as hospitable as your friends the ghosts?"

"How hospitable?"

"Will you join with them in inviting me to remain?"

"Oh no."

The negative was so disdainful, and the girl turned away with so abrupt a haughtiness that she was at the farther end of the chapel before Carew had sufficiently recovered from his astonishment to stir tongue or foot. In the twilight glowed for a single instant the apparition of a dark-blue dress, a pale cheek, and certain dark curls falling with graceful decorum on the whitest of necks; then sunlight and the shadow in question faded away together, and within and without the ruins all was blank and grey.

Carew walked towards the sedilia, and sat down where the departed apparition, had, ten minutes earlier, been meditating.

He sat for a few minutes thinking silently; a queer expression of mischief and perplexity working in eye and lip. That barbed little arrow of a *No* evidently rankled in his mind.

"Doesn't care for the society of mortals, I suppose. The girl has lived with ruins and legends till she is a sort of embodied dream herself. If I were Rip Van Winkle, or one of the Seven Sleepers, I might win a gracious word from her; but being an every-day piece of humanity her goddess-ship scorns me. Such a *No* from a mouth of eighteen summers! I'll paint that face—I'll ——"

"Mrs. Wolfe," said Carew to his landlady, when the pair met next morning in the spacious garden attached to the cottage where he was staying, "I think your daughter has the strangest look I ever saw on any girl's face. Where on earth did she pick it up?"

"In Furness here, Mr. Carew. The lass has lived all her life but the first four years in this very house; and the old ruin is almost all the playmates she ever had. When Maggie was scarce high enough to climb into the Abbot's Seat she would sit by the hour under the stone dragons in the chapel; and now that she's three inches taller than her mother she goes there still. In the day-time, when we're

both busy about the house, she's content with now and then taking a peep at the Abbey from the window; but her first hour after rising and another before it's dark she spends at the altar-end of the chapel —dream—dreaming of the jewels that are hidden there."

"Oh, it isn't the dead old abbots she dreams of, then! What may these jewels be, Mrs. Wolfe?"

"A king's ransom in pearls and rubies, Mr. Carew. The story my grandmother used to tell me forty years ago, and that I often told Maggie when she was a bairn just able to understand me, says that in the Wars of the Roses an Abbot of Furness had a—But I'll leave the legend for Maggie to tell. It suits her tongue far better than mine, and she runs through it much more prettily."

"I'd rather hear it from you," said Mr. Carew.

"And I'd rather my daughter told it. The child's so jealous already of the time you spend in the ruins that I'm sure, if she thought I'd been saying anything to you about the legend, she'd come to me, crying, 'Mother, get a new lodger. If Mr. Carew stays with us, he'll be trying to find the treasure.'"

"These are all the treasures I'm likely to find in the Abbey," said Carew, opening his portfolio of sketches. When his companion had passed a couple of minutes in inspection and admiration, he added: "Of course Miss Wolfe does not put any real faith in this nonsense about abbots and rubies."

"Sometimes she does—sometimes not. I've known her sit for an hour at a time in the Abbot's Seat there, trying to think where the casket could be hidden, and then start up with a little laugh at herself and hurry away. It's thinking of her father and me that makes her take these wild fancies, Mr. Carew. Poor as you see my husband to-day, he kept a better stable ten years ago than Kennet does at his big house on the hill there; and if James Wolfe is now a ruined man, James Wolfe has himself to thank for it. I'm free in talking to you, sir; for there's little to hide from you after that scene the other evening. O, but Maggie's miserable about her father and me! I think she fears sometimes that he'll bring us on the parish before he's done; and the thought's like a continual burning to her. She wants to go and help in Miss Postlethwayte's school at Ulverstone; and glad Miss Postlethwayte would be to have her; for little as the child was when we took her from boarding there, she had learned almost all that the old lady could teach her. But I can't part with her—she's the only being on earth that can do anything with my husband—the only thing left me to care for, or that cares for me. And now, Mr. Carew, I must run in—there's eight o'clock striking, and Maggie will be wondering why I don't come to help her in getting breakfast ready."

"I wonder what the girl thinks of me," was Carew's self-reproachful ejaculation, uttered within hearing of no creature but the rooks, as, after breakfast, the speaker walked down towards the Abbey.

"What should a girl like this Margaret Wolfe, dividing her strange life between dreams of the past and the miseries of the present, know of the meaningless talk men indulge in towards girls whose society they find pleasant for the hour, but don't care to retain for life? I'll talk no more nonsense to this Diana of eighteen. After all,——" Carew halted, and looked back through the trees at the cottage he had left. "No, not a wife," the painter muttered, walking on again. "I don't care to take a wife away with me from Furness. A picture's all I want."

Enter the chapel when he might, Carew failed to find its shadowy desolation brightened by the presence of Margaret Wolfe: and he had received from London the canvas and other materials that he wrote for, and had spent a day or two in meditation over his projected picture before he again saw her in the Abbey ruins.

One afternoon, towards the end of June, Carew had walked across the fields to the ancient town of Dalton. King Harry the Eighth was by this time hopelessly banished from the painter's thoughts: it was the fair form of Margaret that he contemplated placing in the Abbot's Seat.

He had already sketched, rapidly yet carefully, the sight on which his eyes had rested when, on that never-to-be-forgotten evening of early June, he climbed to the window-gap of the ancient chapel and looked towards the sedilia. Contrasted alike vividly with the shadows that crept along broken tombstones and waving grass, and the sunset that touched with flame all the sky above the ruins, the still figure of Margaret Wolfe leaned slightly forward from the niche it occupied; her serious face and deep, dark eyes giving her the aspect of some ensainted phantom. With that face and those strangely-beautiful eyes, as they appeared in the sketch that he had executed, Carew, however, remained dissatisfied. Labour as he might, his brush had failed to catch the expression that he had noted upon the girl's face—a something neither of earth nor heaven.

As in the sweet June twilight the painter walked back from Dalton towards the Abbey ruins, his own face wore an expression curiously serious for one who was ordinarily among the lightest-hearted of living knights of the brush. There was a presence in the little Furness town that loaded the midsummer air with pestilence, and turned men's thoughts from business and pleasure to the terror and mystery of death. As quietly as the darkness that was entering with him, did Carew pass forward into the ruined chapel and towards the familiar niche. The face and form of Margaret Wolfe, absent from the place for a dozen evenings past, looked out once more on him from the sedilia, thoughtful and maidenly as ever.

While Carew still stood hesitating whether to go forward or withdraw, she ended his difficulty by rising and approaching him. "Good evening, Mr. Carew," was her salutation—offered coldly, but without any trace of the constraint that, since their former dialogue in the

ruins, had made few and awkward the words exchanged by the embarrassed pair. "You have been to Dalton—have you not?"

"I have been there all the afternoon," he replied. "And you had better not come near me."

"For fear of the fever, you mean! We have it in our house already. My father has been two or three times at Dalton lately; and to-day he finds himself too ill to rise. If you think there is risk of infection in coming up to our house to fetch your things, I will put them together and send them to whatever address you may give me."

"If I think there is risk of infection!" returned Carew. "You had reason the other evening, Miss Margaret, for thinking me impertinent; but I don't know what cause I have given you to fancy me cowardly."

Neither moon nor star had as yet glimmered out on this June twilight. Through the half-darkness of the ruined chapel, Carew perceived the girl's eyes bent on him with a look—he knew not whether of anger, wonder, or pleasure—that made them shine, starlike.

"Shall I be much in your way if I still stay here?" he asked. "I shall need very little attendance—most matters I can manage for myself; and for dinner I can walk over, when necessary, to Dalton. Not much danger of my carrying the fever with me—it's all over the town already."

"Are you not afraid of taking it yourself, Mr. Carew? If you come back to our house to-night, how do you know but it may be never to leave it again alive."

"You evidently look upon me as a very nervous and fanciful kind of person," said Carew.

"If you were not fanciful, would you be an artist? I don't think you are nervous, though; no one who was nervous would seek the company of that terrible fever. But really, Mr. Carew, what good can you do by staying? It is very friendly and generous of you to wish it; but what use will it be?"

"Who will nurse your father though his illness."

"My mother and myself, certainly."

"And do you imagine that you two women will be sufficient? Have you any idea what, in a case like your father's, the delirium will be?"

"We can get help from Dalton."

"The fever will prevent you. In such weather as this, and in a town like Dalton, there is certain to be an outburst of the disease that will drive everything into fright and confusion. Don't throw away a volunteer helper, Miss Wolfe; you may find it a difficult matter to replace me."

The girl hesitated. "And your sketching?" she said, at last.

"My sketching is finished, and the picture I am setting about can

wait. I assure you, I'm as little afraid of being inconvenienced as of dying of the fever."

What a marvellous amount may at times be clearly expressed, yet left unspoken! As if the eye had been a mirror into which each looked and perceived the secret of the other's mind, Margaret knew that Carew, in saying "I will stay," added mentally, "In order to be near *you*;" Carew discerned that Margaret, had not her heart somehow been at conflict with her judgment, would, gratefully but decisively, have declined his offer and entreated him to leave.

"Let us see what my mother will think of your wish to remain," she said, presently, when she had given her hand to him in token of thanks, and he had pressed the proffered fingers warmly. They went slowly forth from the ruins, and up the path that led to the cottage, both as silent as the twilight. If either thought of the disdainfully-ended interview of a fortnight back, it was to wonder that such a scene had been. If either reflected that Margaret Wolfe and Francis Carew had known each other, in all, five weeks, it was with an undefined sense that the talk just ended had magically changed those weeks to years.

Mrs. Wolfe behaved as her daughter had known, and Carew had more than suspected, she would behave. In times of distress, her sole refuge was to cling to whatever stronger nature happened to be near her. She was so ready to avail herself of Carew's proposal, that she altogether forgot to thank him.

As the July days grew hotter and hotter, and the reports from Dalton became more and more gloomy, Carew, although his step remained light and his voice cheerful, began to draw in the Furness air as though it choked him. Out at Furness Abbey there was happily no death-bell to depress with its frequent toll both the sick and those who watched by them: but the ravings of the sufferer were even more oppressive to a listener than such a bell would have been. Wolfe had lived for years past the life of the habitual drunkard; and he was now dying the death of one. Three days of acute delirium, during which the patient tasked to the utmost the young artist's strength and endurance, gave place to stupor with intervals of low mutterings, in which, like Falstaff, the sick man "babbled of green fields"—those green Furness fields across which he was not again to stagger home from an evening's carousing. Then followed coma-vigil; and the glassy, meaningless eyes that stared unchangingly from the pillow told those gathered round the bed that he who lay there was marked for death.

Wolfe died in the night; Margaret and the doctor only being with him. When Carew rose next morning, to take, if necessary, his turn at watching, he met the widow at the door of the death-chamber. "Oh, Mr. Carew," she said wildly, "Maggie has the fever. My husband's dead, and she will die too!"

The anticipated news of Wolfe's death was forgotten in the

sudden danger for the living. For a moment Carew stared blankly at the grief-stricken face before him, unable to realise that such words had indeed been uttered. "Does Dr. Edmondson think it will be a severe attack?" he said, presently.

"He does—he does. He won't say so; but he does. Oh, she'll die, Mr. Carew—she'll die; as her father died last night, and as her mother will die after her. There won't be time to put a stone over James's grave, before Maggie and I are lying beside him in the new cemetery at Dalton." She laid her face to the wall, and burst into an agony of tears. "Leave us, Mr. Carew, leave us, before the fever takes you, and you die too."

To Carew's vigorous nature this paroxysm of helpless grief came as a call to action that made him instantly the master of his own. "Leave you, Mrs. Wolfe! Why, when could I better be of use? Where's Dr. Edmondson?"

"Gone back to Dalton. He says he'll send us a nurse, if he can find one."

"I must see him. Sit by your daughter, please, till I return. You don't mind being left alone in the house with her and—and ——"

It was now broad daylight. Mrs. Wolfe, well understanding Carew's half-spoken meaning, could, therefore, with sufficient confidence, answer, "No." The artist added a few words of encouragement and consolation; and hastened off.

The doctor, a will-o'-the-wisp flitting from patient to patient, had secured no nurse, and had little hope of obtaining one. "The few women in Dalton fit to be trusted with the care of a fever-patient, have their hands more than full already. If you could go over to Ulverstone, though, for me, Mr. Carew ——"

"To Lancaster, if you like, doctor."

Dr. Edmondson scribbled a few words, addressed them, and gave Carew the necessary directions.

The July days crept slowly past, a succession of blazing noons and sultry evenings, that parched and cracked the Furness fields into a ghastly similitude to those cheeks and lips on which rested a still fiercer breath than that of the sun—the burning kiss of fever. Day by day the furnace-like atmosphere aided doubtful reports from the sick-room to oppress Carew with more cruel fears concerning Margaret. Now that he no longer saw her, and could not in delicacy venture further than to the threshold of the chamber where she hovered between life and death, the full extent of the impression this singular girl had made upon him was gradually revealed. He wrought feverishly and assiduously at his picture, that by painting her pure, serious face as it appeared in health, he might distract his mind from the thought of it when flushed with the delirium of fever.

The pear-tree that, when the artist opened his window, nodded before him branches laden with ripening fruit, stretched other branches towards the chamber-window of the sick girl. When both casements stood open for the heavy summer air to enter, words spoken in the one room struck on the ears of a listener in the other. Leaning out towards the pear-tree, Carew had already caught on several occasions the voice of Margaret Wolfe, weak from illness, and too indistinct for his ear to separate its faint accents into words.

He was leaning thus in the early morning of the first of August, drinking in deep draughts of a fresher air than had fanned his cheek for weeks past, and rejoicing in the cool breeze that sang softly among the leaves of the patch of woodland opposite. Rain had fallen in the night—the first shower for nearly a month; and all nature lay green, dewy, and healthful, in the smiling August dawn. Carew, his artist's imagination quickened by the beauty of the scene before him, half-believed that the goddess of the morning, sweet Aurora, was herself in presence.

"She is come to cool your parched lips with her kisses, my poor Margaret."

A laugh, dissonant and mirthless, jarred on the ears of the young painter, as he murmured this fancy to himself. It was difficult to realise that it came from the lips he apostrophised.

"See, mother, see, the Abbot is trying to take the casket from me! O, mother, what hundreds of pearls and rubies there are in it! We'll sell them in London; and buy the old house again; and have as much land as we had before father began to drink. Lady Dorothy doesn't like the plan, she says. There's her ghost behind the others. Oh, how pretty she is;—what lovely blue eyes, and what an innocent face for a woman that was so wicked! Hers is just the hair to twist strings of pearls in. Take the casket!—take it!—for fear the ghosts should be too strong for me. There's more of them rising—hundreds of them—the room's full of their faces. Oh, what horrible creatures! Keep them off, mother; don't let them come near the bed. Where's Mr. Carew—he would drive them away. Oh, mother, their cold hands are touching me! O, help, help!"

With the girl's scream ringing in his ears, Carew hurried out of the room and house. He painted nothing that day; the exquisite mental pain occasioned by Margaret's delirium had unfitted him to handle the brush. A weary time spent among the Abbey ruins gave place to a sleepless night; and when, on the following morning, he attempted, by way of breaking the painful monotony of his thoughts, to resume his picture, the result was so unsatisfactory that he cast the brush from him in despair. The three succeeding days were among the most painful that Carew had ever spent.

On the fourth, an hour or two after he had risen, there came a

light tap at his room door. Opening it, he found himself confronted by Mrs. Wolfe's frightened face, and despairing eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Carew," she wailed, "my child's dying! The doctor says she may pass away without waking from the stupor she's in. Come, and see her once again before she dies."

Carew had never more than a confused and misty recollection of the minutes that followed. He remembered dimly a somewhat large room; airy, and fresh, and cool, as befits the chamber in which science and affection contend with the demon of fever. The exhausted nurse had retired to her own room to rest; but from the pillows of the bed there looked forth a wasted, strangely-solemn face, more beautiful in its strange stillness than it had been in the serene seriousness of health. The eyes were closed; it seemed the face of one dead.

The great grief that already wrapt her with its shadow had imparted to the mother a self-restraint and dignity that in ordinary seasons were foreign to her nature. She burst into no loud paroxysm of weeping; nor did the anguish stamped upon her features find expression in multiplied complaints. For the first few minutes that the pair stood there, all Mrs. Wolfe said was, "There's death in her face, you see, Mr. Carew. God's taking from me my daughter."

"I want you to paint her for me," she went on presently. "There never was such a face as hers in Furness; and now she's dying, she's more beautiful than ever. Paint her, Mr. Carew; give me a picture of her sweet face, that when she's gone from me I may have something to look on that will remind me of her, and keep me from going mad."

Carew, unable to trust his voice, silently signed assent. He fetched his sketching materials, and fell quietly to work. Mrs. Wolfe, after watching him for a while in silence, felt her grief rising chokingly in her throat, and went away to her own room to sob and pray.

The August day stole on, still and breathless, as if the wind, and the birds in the woods, and the very leaves and waters had all hushed themselves in recognition of the presence of death. About the time when the western sky was flushed with a fever of sunset, and shadows like coffin-palls were trailing across grass and woodland, Carew laid down his brush, and looked from the imaged face that had grown beneath his skilful fingers to that other face shrouded by curtain and pillow. He had finished his task.

Mrs. Wolfe had returned to the bedside of her insensible daughter, and sat now in a chair by one of the windows, lost in sorrowful thoughts, and motionless as the twilight. Carew stepped lightly past her, and bent over the face on the pillow. Would those sealed lids never unclose again? Must this stupor, as the physician had feared, glide insensibly into an enduring sleep?

"It looks like sleep," he thought. He touched the widow gently on the arm. "See, Mrs. Wolfe, how happy her face is. This is sleep that God is giving her. It can't be death."

His companion rose; and the two stood side by side, looking earnestly on wasted cheek and drooping eyelash. "Oh, if she would but open her eyes again," said the mother, sorrowfully.

As if the wish had been a summons, the eyes of the sleeper unclosed themselves, and Margaret looked at the two before her. "Mother," she said, in that most delightful of voices—the voice of the rescued one who has passed safely the crisis of fever and shaken off its delirium—"Mr. Carew!"

In the Academy Exhibition of the following year, few pictures were more noticed than the single canvas contributed by Francis Leigh Carew, A.R.A. The scene of this painting was laid in the chapel of the ruined Abbey of Furness; the hour was that of midsummer twilight. From the central niche of the three seats of carven stone that still adorn the chapel, a girlish face looked forth, wondering but undismayed, upon the apparition that confronted her. This was the ghostly figure of an Abbot, unsubstantial yet distinct; and frowning malignly upon the fair creature before him. The girl held in her hand an antique jewel-casket, from which a wealth of pearl and ruby had showered out into her lap. This treasure the dim hand of the phantom was extended to reclaim.

Three or four days after the opening of the Exhibition, there halted before the already-purchased picture a young couple for whom it evidently possessed no common interest. The hour was unfashionable, and the room almost empty; and to these facts, rather than to her thin veil, and eyes aglow with radiant happiness, Margaret Carew owed it that no inquisitive stare and whisper proclaimed her revealed to others than her husband as the original of the ghost-confronted maiden of the picture.

"I found something better in the Abbey than pearls and rubies, Frank," she said, at last. Then, as Carew, disturbed from his visions of midsummer twilights, and rooks sailing in the glow of sunset above an ancient ruin, looked round at her, her eloquent eye and mobile lip whispered to him: "My husband."

Carew made no answer until they had reached home; nor, indeed, for a day or two afterwards. One morning at breakfast, however, he suddenly set before his wife a vividly-tinted sketch of her face in its bridal aspect of blushing happiness.

"Pearl and ruby, Margaret," he said, pointing to the scarlet lips, and white, small teeth revealed by the smile that parted them. "I found them in the Abbey of Furness."

THE MIRAGE.

Across the wild and barren wastes,
Beneath a maddening, cloudless sky,
The lonely pilgrim panting hastes,
No grateful shade, no water nigh;
No water—he must drink or die.

For weary miles behind him lies
The track that he has travelled o'er;
For weary miles he yet descries
The sterile, pathless plain before;
Sand, burning sand, and nothing more.

What, nothing but the desert? Stay—
An effort and the strain is past!
For yonder, not so far away,
The cool oasis looms at last,
And waving palms their shelter cast.

Surely around a fairer spot
The fervent sunbeams never shone!
The way was hard—it matters not,
Thus cheered the traveller presses on—
Only to find the vision gone.

Is there no mirage save the one
That mocks the wanderer's fevered pain,
Who journeying 'neath Sahara's sun,
Beholds the haven he would gain,
And striving, ever strives in vain?

The man engrossed in greed for wealth,
Toiling perchance till he abuse
His time, his talents, and his health—
Or fame or pleasure does he choose—
It is a mirage he pursues.

A mirage born of mists that cling
About the cloud-encumbered earth;
Our human sense bewildering
'Twixt fleeting joys that have no worth,
And hidden ones of holier birth.

For lo, when to his longing eyes
The boon he coveted is near;
And when his hand may pluck the prize,
Eternity dawns sharp and clear,
Earth and her shadows disappear.

And, if the moral you would know
Before I lay aside my pen—
The goal we seek is not below,
But far beyond our mortal ken;
Immortal, we shall see it then!—Sydney Grey.

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The Argosy

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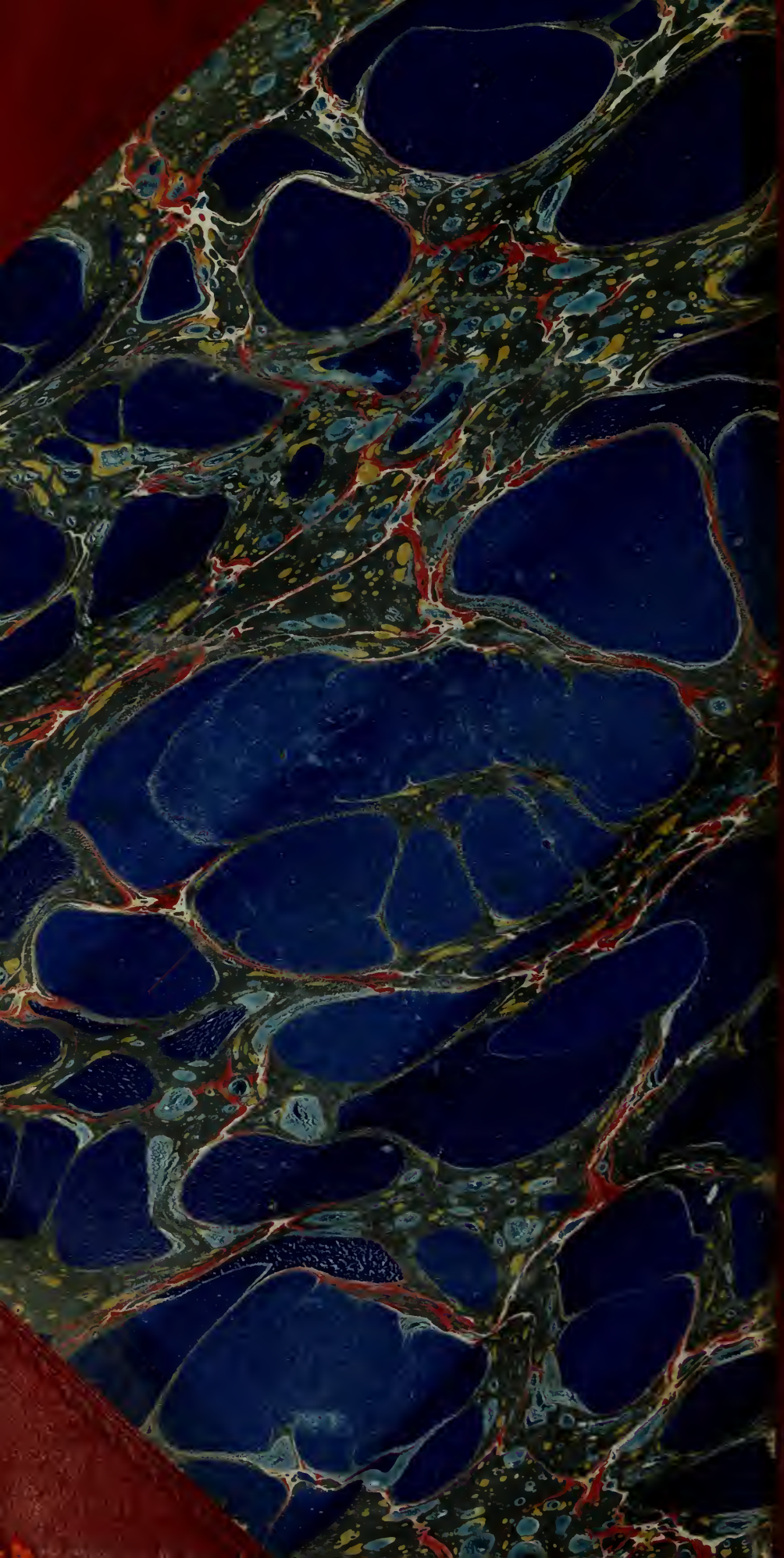
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